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TITLE OF THESIS...GEORGE ORWELL ON ~~[illegible]~~..
...EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CLASS

....

UNIVERSITY....ALBERTA..............................

DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS PRESENTED...M.Ed.............

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED...1973.......................

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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

GEORGE ORWELL ON SOCIAL CLASS AND EDUCATION

by

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A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF EDUCATION
IN
HISTORY OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

EDMONTON, ALBERTA
FALL, 1973

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "George Orwell on Social Class and Education," submitted by INGRID JOHANNA PANAYI in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in History of Education.

Supervisor

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Date . . June 25, 1973

ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with George Orwell's ideas on the relationship of social class and education in England in the inter-war period.

Before embarking into a study of the three major social classes as they appear from Orwell's writings, it was necessary to attempt a brief over-view of Orwell's life and times. Chapter II is concerned with just such an over-view.

In Chapter III the upper class is analysed from an educational perspective, that is, from the point of view of the home environment and schooling of the child. These factors are seen to directly influence the character of the ruling class. Orwell's descriptions of his own childhood in upper class preparatory and public schools proves to be of interest in this regard.

Chapter IV is concerned with those middle class groups with which Orwell was intimately familiar throughout his life. His knowledge primarily of the declining but respectable middle classes sheds light on middle class home life and schooling. Orwell's two years' teaching experience in cheap private schools gives added weight to his comments on this class, which is so much the product of the education it gives its children.

Orwell is well known for his comprehensive observations on down-and-out and working class life. Chapter V analyses the working class from the point of view of its home culture and schooling. The prime

educational influence proves to be the home culture, since the schools offered an entirely alien value system which was, as Orwell noticed, resisted by the working class.

Orwell was not only interested but actively involved in the major events and issues of his time. Chapter VII discusses Orwell's view of the emerging 'new middle class' which was to become a significant social group in post-war England. In the early war period, Orwell offered his own solution to what he saw to be a social crisis, and his proposals are also discussed in this chapter, particularly the recommendations for educational reform. It is suggested that these proposed reforms would have positively assisted the evolving new middle class, and were intended to help establish a meritocratic society. Presumably, at the time, Orwell felt that meritocracy was preferable to the class society it was supposed to replace, although he seems to have reconsidered this point at the time of writing Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Chapter VII draws together the major conclusions of the study, and observes that, despite his very considerable personal biases, Orwell's unique experience of so wide a range of social classes makes him a particularly valuable contributor to the record of educational practice in the England of his times.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In writing this thesis I am greatly indebted both to Dr. J. McLeish and to Dr. K. Thompson who made many useful suggestions and comments. In particular I would like to thank Dr. P. J. Miller who provided invaluable guidance in the direction of the study, and patiently corrected the written text.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to present an analysis of those writings of George Orwell which deal with the questions of social class and education. Interest in Orwell's writings has grown steadily since his death in 1950, with the result that almost the entire body of his writings which includes novels, essays, journalism reviews and letters, is now for the first time available to a wide readership. This growing interest in the Orwell literature has also affected literary critics, who have produced and are still producing great numbers of studies related to Orwell, his life and ideas.

However, although Orwell's personality and writings have been examined from many aspects, he has not yet been studied from the point of view of his contribution to educational thought. This is perhaps not very extraordinary, since education _per se_ is only a minor theme of his writings. Yet on looking more deeply into the question, it can be noticed that Orwell's educational contribution is far more interesting than its volume might at first indicate.

It is of course difficult to deal with Orwell's writings on education in isolation. Orwell's descriptions and analyses of education in England, as well as his proposals for educational reform, are so closely tied to his notions of social class that it becomes necessary to take into account this aspect of his thought when discussing his ideas on education. Nor is it particularly surprising that social class should have figured so highly among his concerns. England has now, and had also in Orwell's time, an extremely well-defined class system which has only been muted and certainly not destroyed with the passing of the years. In contrast with most Western countries, notably those other nations which go to make up Great Britain, social classes in England can still be fairly well defined in terms of occupational pattern, economic and social status, and attitudinal characteristics. Social classes, moreover, correlate strongly with educational background, since the different classes have distinct child-rearing customs and send their children to different kinds of schools. This is still true today, but it was even more true in Orwell's time. Consequently the observations of this perceptive witness of the inter-war scene are interesting not only from a historical point of view but also because they provide an interesting background to a very contemporary debate.

The particular value of Orwell's contribution lies in the fact that all his comments and observations are based directly on personal experience. His youthful experience of colonial police service in Burma resulted in Burmese Days, while the years spent as a part-time tramp are recorded in Down and Out in Paris and London. Several months spent on the Spanish front provided the material for Homage to Catalonia, and his famous book on the depression, The Road to Wigan Pier, was the result of two months spent in the industrial north. Similarly with regard to education, Orwell only recorded impressions which had been gathered first-hand. His early years at an expensive preparatory school resulted in a long essay, Such, Such Were the Joys, while his two years of teaching in a cheap private school is recorded indirectly in his novel A Clergyman's Daughter. Orwell also has a great deal to say about the different home cultures of the various classes, all of which was based directly on his own experience, and he was certainly one of the first to recognise the existence of the popular culture of the working classes, and to appreciate its merits.[1]

Interesting as Orwell's comments are, however, they cannot be taken as unbiased and objective accounts of class and education in his time. There are certain difficulties which must be overcome with regard to the material he provides. The first of these difficulties is that Orwell's experience in the various sectors of class culture and schooling was by no means uniform, nor was it entirely complete. It will be noticed, for example, that he has a great deal to say about the upper class school system and comparatively little to say about upper class home life; while in the case of the working class the situation is reversed and one finds that he has a great deal to say about working class home culture and almost nothing to say about the schools the children attended. Even in the case of the middle classes, Orwell knew little about grammar schools, which catered for a large proportion of the children of this class, and he seemsto have imagined that these schools slavishly imitated public school format. This incompleteness must be acknowledged. But at the same time it does not follow that Orwell's contribution is therefore meaningless; on the contrary, his experience encompasses a far greater spectrum than the vast majority of observers, and for this reason alone his conclusions should not be overlooked.

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[1] Later examples would be Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams.

A second difficulty one encounters when faced with the body of Orwell's writings is one of credibility, for even the most cursory reading of Orwell's works reveals the man to have been emotionally deeply involved in the issues he discussed. His writings were above all the result of experience, and experience for Orwell meant passionate involvement. Fortunately, however, Orwell's biases are immediately obvious, and familiarity with Orwell's life and personality are sufficient to put his vagaries into focus.

A final area of difficulty with regard to Orwell's educational writings involves the changes of opinion which he underwent during his twenty years as a writer. The most significant of these changes was his gradual weaning away from socialism, which he seems to have only superficially espoused in the first place. A more dramatic change was his conversion to the war effort once the Second World War had begun, even though, a few months previously, he had been firmly anti-war in attitude, hoping for a universal rejection of the capitalist war. For the most part, these changes do not substantially affect the quality of Orwell's observations on such issues as education. But they do serve to indicate that his analysis of the political scene was not precise enough to be able to provide him with an accurate vision of the future. However, at this point of time, it is relatively easy to perceive the areas where Orwell's observations and predictions are less than reliable, and when these are gleaned from his work there is still a quantity of valuable and illuminating material remaining, all gathered at first hand. Despite the difficulties that must be faced, Orwell's contributions on the questions of social class and education are sufficiently interesting to merit consideration.

As has been mentioned, Orwell has been the subject of considerable analysis, both in periodical articles and books. The articles, for the most part, are concerned with various literary aspects of Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four, or alternatively with Orwell as a man of integrity, a rebel or a socialist. Orwell seems to have won the respect of a number of well-known figures who have written articles on him, notably Arthur Koestler, Bertrand Russell and Sean O'Casey.

In addition to the articles there exists an impressive selection of books, many of which have employed a topical approach, dealing with Orwell's socialism, his experience of Empire, or his down-and-out life. His attitude to social class has occasionally been mentioned, but never in relation to education. The literary works on Orwell can be broken down into several categories: literary biographies by those who knew Orwell personally, literary biographies by those who did not know him, and lastly studies that are topically orientated.

Three examples of the first category deserve special mention. One is George Orwell by Richard Rees (1961) who was a life-long friend and benefactor of Orwell. This warm and sympathetic portrait of Orwell carefully overlooks the fact that it was Rees who was satirised as the patron Ravelston in Keep the Aspidistra Flying. There is an interesting chapter in this book where Rees recalls Orwell as he knew him. Another life-long acquaintance was Christopher Hollis who wrote and himself published A Study of George Orwell (1956). Hollis was a contemporary of Orwell at Eton and he drew on his Eton memories as well as Cyril Connolly's memories of St. Cyprians (the preparatory school attended by Orwell and Connolly) in order to reject some of Orwell's more extravagant statements about discrimination within these schools. A friend of Orwell's in the latter part of his life was George Woodcock, now a professor at the University of British Columbia, who published The Crystal Spirit (1966). Professor Woodcock found it impossible to proceed with his study of Orwell's themes, politics and literary style without first setting down his memories of the man on paper. The anecdotes and general interpretations he provides amplify, but do not substantially change, the image of the man as he emerges from the descriptions of others.

Not all the literary biographies of Orwell are written by acquaintances. Those that are not can be divided into two groups, those that are chronological and those that are topic-oriented. The older studies tend to be chronological. The first of these criticisms to be published was Laurence Brander's George Orwell (1954) and John Atkins' George Orwell (1954). Both these studies examine the development of Orwell's views through a chronological examination of those of his writings which were then available, and they tend to duplicate each other. Three subsequent studies examine Orwell's life and views from topic such as socialism, poverty and class; these are B. T. Oxley's George Orwell (1967), Edward Thomas's Orwell (1965) and Raymond Williams' George Orwell (1971). Richard Vorhees, in The Paradox of George Orwell (1961) has approached Orwell's life and times from the aspect of the apparent contradiction in his views.

All the books mentioned so far have been concerned with Orwell's ideas and personality as expressed through his writings and through personal recollections. Only recently has Orwell been made the subject of a different kind of study. In 1965 Jenni Calder published Chronicles of Conscience which is a comparative study of Orwell and Arthur Koestler. Another original type of study is The Making of George Orwell (1969) by Keith Aldritt. This book attempts to explain Orwell in terms which are exclusively literary. One might criticise such an approach for its one-sidedness; Orwell was after all a man of action who saw himself as a political journalist more than as a novelist. A more recent contribution to the Orwell shelves is Miriam Gross's The World of George Orwell (1970). As a collection of essays by people who knew Orwell at the various stages of his life, or who could provide an insight into one of the periods, it makes highly interesting reading, although the centre of interest is Orwell the man rather than his works. In 1972 two Americans, Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, brought out The Unknown Orwell, dealing with Orwell's early life up till the time when he was commissioned to write The Road to Wigan Pier (1936). This book has come closer than any other book to writing the biography that Orwell requested in his will should not be written. The authors have gathered their material meticulously, and presented it in full detail, with the result that the critic John Wain commented that it reads like an "enormous footnote." It is a book that is of interest only to those who seek to demythologize Orwell, and it seems to have displeased Orwell's widow, Sonia Brownell Orwell, who has since decided to authorize the definitive biography. Bernard Crick has been commissioned to write this book, which should appear some time in 1974. To date, then, Orwell's contributions to educational thought has been a neglected area.

This thesis will proceed with an outline of Orwell's life and times in Chapter II. Chapters III, IV, and V are concerned with Orwell's perception of the upper class, middle classes and the working class, examined from the point of view of the education the respective classes offer their children, both within the home and in the schools. Chapter VI is concerned with Orwell's vision of the future and his view of the evolving 'new middle class.' This chapter also deals with Orwell's recommendations for educational reform, and the educational implications which can be drawn from Animal Farm and Nineteen Eight-Four. Chapter VII offers a conclusion.

CHAPTER II

A WORLD APART

Childhood Isolation

The major part of Orwell's life was lived in unusual isolation from the England of his period. It was not until well into the thirties that he became fully involved in the events and social questions of his day, and even then his involvement was curiously individualistic.

Orwell, whose real name was Eric Arthur Blair, is best judged, therefore, from the context of his experience rather than from the context of the times in which he lived. Of prime importance in this respect was his family background. He was born into a typical Anglo-Indian family which had served in India and the far East over several generations. His mother's family was originally French, and had made a modest fortune in the timber trade in Burma. His father, Richard Blair, had already served a long and inconspicuous term with the Opium Department of the Indian Civil Service in Bengal, when his only son Eric was born. Eric Blair was born in 1903, in Motihari in Bengal. The young Orwell had two sisters, Marjorie, who was five years older, and Avril, who was five years younger than himself, and who was born after the family had moved back to England on the retirement of Richard Blair.

On moving permanently to England in 1907, the Blair family led the kind of life typical of their class. They were rather rootless, continually moving from one house to another, although for most of

Orwell's childhood the Blair home was in the Henley-on-Thames area. The children attended an Anglican convent school in their early years, although by 1911 it had been decided that Orwell was to attend St. Cyprians, an expensive private school in Eastbourne, Sussex. Since Richard Blair's income was strictly limited, a fortunate agreement was arrived at by which the boy was taken on reduced fees on the understanding that he would prove to be intelligent enough to win a scholarship to one of the better public schools. Orwell's experience of St. Cyprians, which will be discussed at length in the next chapter, proved to be quite formative, and the obvious discrimination to which he was subject on account of his relative poverty served to intensify the feeling of isolation to which the child was already pre-disposed on account of his Anglo-Indian background.

Following his years at the private preparatory school, Orwell spent almost five years at Eton College to which he had been fortunate enough to win a Kings' Scholarship. Since Eton is a boarding school, and since it has a higher status than any other public school in England, Orwell can be safely said to have spent the five years (from 1917 until 1921) in something of a hot-house atmosphere, cut off from the world at large. A general idea of Eton at this time can be acquired from Cyril Connolly's Enemies of Promise (1939). Connolly was a close friend of Orwell's, both at St. Cyprians and at Eton, but he differed from Orwell in being much more involved in Eton life than Orwell ever was. As he emerges from Connolly's memories, and also from those of other contemporaries, Orwell appears to have been very much of a 'loner' at Eton.

The first recorded evidence of Orwell's concern with the world outside Eton was a rather doggerel-like poem entitled "Awake! Young men of England" which was published in the Henley and South Oxfordshire Standard in 1914. The poem did not have any literary merit - in fact few of Orwell's poems ever did - but it showed that Orwell shared an attitude to the war which was common to young men of his class, for the poem was carefully studded with cliches referring to the nobility of honour and patriotism within the context of the just war.

In 1940 Orwell wrote his memories of the First World War in an essay entitled "My Country Right or Left." He makes the statement that the war in fact had no reality for him at the time:

> If I honestly sort out my memories and disregard what I have learned since, I must admit that nothing in the whole war moved me so deeply as the loss of the Titanic had done a few years previously.[1]

He goes on to admit that his chief memory of the later war was margarine: "It is an instance of the horrible selfishness of children that by 1917 the war had almost ceased to affect us except through our stomachs."[2]

It is extraordinary that Orwell was so out of touch with the realities of the war, since his father actually served in France. Orwell never seems to have mentioned this fact to his friends at school, but this was probably because he did not have a close relationship with his aging and rather withdrawn father.

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[1] George Orwell, "My Country Right or Left," in Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters, ed. by Sonia Brownell Orwell and Ian Angus (Harmondsworth Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968) I, 587.

[2] Ibid., p. 588.

During his last years at Eton Orwell became more politically conscious, but his opinions were formed from within the Eton framework, and his views had more in common with those of a few of his schoolfellows than with the radically-minded outside the school. In the years immediately following the war the prevailing mood among Eton Collegers (that is, the Kings' Scholars), was mildly anti-authoritarian. Orwell himself was something of a sceptic, with a tendency to be cynical, if the reports of his contemporaries are correct. He readily fell in with the general mood, and was in some respects a leader of the movement. A particular butt for his rather sardonic wit was the Officer Training Corps (O.T.C.) which Eton scholars, and all other public schoolboys, customarily joined. It was understood that in time of war the public schools could provide a reserve of trained officers, who would take a position of command in the forces over men of inferior social class.

In the years immediately following the war, the Etonians who had just missed active service tended to debunk the O.T.C. in much the same way as they derided the official Anglican faith. Christopher Hollis, who was at Eton at the same time as Orwell records an incident which illustrates Orwell's attitude with regard to religion. Describing a scene on the playing field, when Orwell approached a new student with a pencil and paper in his hand, Hollis relates the following dialogue:

> Blair: I'm collecting the religion of the new boys. Are you a Cyrenaic, Sceptic, Epicurian, Neoplatonist, Confusican or Zoroastrian?
> Blakiston: I'm a Christian.
> Blair: (gravely) Oh, we haven't had that before.[1]

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[1] Christopher Hollis, A Study of George Orwell (London: Hollis and Carter, 1956), p. 23.

The anti-authoritarian attitude of Orwell's Election, or year group, found expression in the reforms they carried through when they reached the top of the school. Much was done to liberalise the harsh discipline of the school in the years 1920 to 1921.

Although the mood in Eton in the immediate post-war period was in some ways a product of the political situation outside, being largely a response to the conclusion of the war, it does not follow that it was identical to the mood in Britain as a whole. The Etonian reaction was as much a rejection of the enforced militarism, discipline and religion of the school itself, as a response to the political situation in the country as a whole. Yet Orwell does not seem to have perceived the difference between the adolescent 'rebellion' of Eton boys, and the new mood among the rest of the nation, who were hoping for a new deal with the return of the forces from Europe. This tendency of Orwell's to identify the two things is witnessed by his use of the word "antinomian" to describe the situation in Britain after the war:

> For several years it was the fashion to be "Bolshie," as people then called it. England was full of half-baked antinomian opinions, pacifism internationalism, humanitarianism of all kinds, feminism, free love, divorce reform, atheism, birth-control - things like these were getting a better hearing than they would get in normal times.[1]

As well as showing Orwell's essential conservatism, this passage shows that Orwell equated Britain with Eton, simply by his use of the term "antinomian." Etonians, in common only with themselves, redefined this word, which in general usage refers to the belief that faith and God-given grace relieves the believer from subjection to any law whatever, to mean a general rejection of authority.[1] That Orwell should use a word totally unfamiliar to his non-Etonian readership - and it can be found on several occasions throughout his works - indicates that his background in the sheltered Eton of the immediate post-war period had little in common with that of most Englishmen of his time. For this reason one must doubt the validity of his statements about the Britain of the early twenties. Statements such as the following present an exaggerated picture of the post-war mood:

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[1] George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 121.

> But those years, during and just after the war, were a queer time to be at school, for England was nearer revolution than she has been since or had been for a century earlier. Throughout almost the whole nation there was running a wave of revolutionary feeling which has since been reversed or forgotten, but which has left various deposits of sediment behind.[2]

It may well have been true that Eton was "nearer revolution" than at any other time in its history, but this was hardly the case in England at that time. Probably a better way to describe the mood would be to suggest that the immediate post-war years were a time of elation for most people who expected an immediate elevation in the standard of living. When this failed to materialise, and when certain segments of the labour force - particularly those centred around heavy industry - began to feel the effects of recession, the prevailing mood became one of disillusion. The 1926 General Strike was not the potential revolution the ruling class expected it to be, and it was marked by over-reaction on the part of the government who put down the strike with an unnecessary show of force. Throughout the thirties the behaviour of the unemployed was constantly misinterpreted and seen by the ruling class as incipient revolution. Orwell, as far as he was involved, probably misconstrued working class motives in much the same way.

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[1] See Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, The Unknown Orwell (London: Constable, 1972), p. 103.

[2] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 120.

Imperial Exile

After a short interlude spent with his parents, who were living in Southwold, Sussex, at the time he left Eton, Orwell studied for and passed the examination for entrance into the Indian Imperial Police. Having passed this screening, Orwell chose to go to Burma where his mother's family had connections, and where his grandmother was still living. In October 1922 he set sail for Rangoon. Orwell stayed a full five years in Burma, and those years were sufficient to give him the impression that Imperial rule was essentially tyrannical. He seems to have been left with an acute sense of guilt after this period, but it is a guilt that he felt to be shared by all Anglo-Indian officials. Orwell points out that this sense of guilt is totally unintelligible to those English who never become involved in Imperial rule: "In the free air of England that kind of thing is not fully intelligible. In order to hate imperialism you have got to be a part of it."[1]

Once again, a case can be made to prove that Orwell's experience was essentially different from that of the vast majority of English, and that the problems he faced were not the same as those faced by the rest of the nation. He describes his experiences and feeling of guilt at length.

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 126.

> Seen from the outside the British rule in India appears - indeed is - benevolent and even necessary; and so no doubt are the French rule in Morocco and the Dutch rule in Borneo, for people usually govern foreigners better than they govern themselves. But it is not possible to be a part of such a system without recognising it as an unjustifiable tyranny. Even the thickest-skinned Anglo-Indian is aware of this. Every native face he sees in the street brings home to him his monstrous intrusion. And the majority of Anglo-Indians, intermittently at least, are not nearly so complacent about their position as people in England believe. From the most unexpected people, from gin-pickled old scoundrels high up in the Government service, I have heard such remarks as 'Of course we've no right in this blasted country at all. Only now we're here, for God's sake let's stay here.' The truth is that no modern man, in his heart of hearts, believes that it is right to invade a foreign country and hold the population down by force.[1]

For some, such as the doctors, engineers and forest officers, this onus of guilt was not so acute, but Orwell felt that as a policeman he had been forced to carry out the 'dirty work of Empire,' doing tasks which involved brutality, which caused him to feel despised by other Europeans. Yet the experience of police work proved to be useful for Orwell, since it provided him with some useful material for essays in later years. The sensitive and revealing essays "A Hanging" (1931) and "Shooting an Elephant" (1936) were the results of this experience, as well as the best written of his novels Burmese Days (1934).

Altogether it was a lonely life that Orwell led in Burma, being moved from place to place, often being the only European for miles, with the isolation of authority forced upon him. Stansky and Abrahams have managed to draw up an almost day-by-day account of Orwell's experiences.[1] Despite their assiduity, nothing very spectacular emerges, and the research proves to be a rather meaningless exercise. All the material serves to do is to underline Orwell's isolation during this period, for he was cut off not only from the natives but also from his fellow Europeans, and he made no close friends.

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[1] Ibid.

Orwell's profound sense of guilt with regard to the Burmese might appear to be an example of emotional over-reaction, were it not for the fact that Burma in Orwell's time was in a state of agitation and dissatisfaction with British rule. The actual degree of native-British friction emerges clearly from Maung Htin Aung's article "George Orwell and Burma." In it he argues: "Before 1919 the English and the Burmese were friends, and after 1930 they were merely political opponents; but in the dark period between 1919 and 1930 they were bitter enemies."[2] This was a period of violent peasant uprisings and equally violent repression by the British, who were firmly resolved not to make any concessions to Burmese desires for greater self-determination. The Burmese had been greatly offended by the incorporation of Burma as a province of India, since they had a long history of independence under their kings; and even more they resented the implied insult of the Government of India Act which left Burma out of the reforms which were to be carried out in the other provinces.

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[1] Stansky and Abrahams, Unknown Orwell, Part 3.

[2] Maung Htin Aung, "George Orwell and Burma," in Miriam Gross (ed.), The World of George Orwell (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971).

This period, therefore, was a difficult one for imperial administrators and it must have come as a shock to the young Orwell whose family connections with Burma belonged to an altogether different period. Yet Burma gave Orwell a lot to think about. It appears from his writings that he had a love-hate relationship with the country and its people, and he seems to have been haunted by his memories of Burma for many years. Yet this experience was altogether different from that of the average Englishman, so once again Orwell's experiences set him apart. In The Road to Wigan Pier he makes the claim that his time spent in Burma made him conscious of "an immense weight of guilt that I had got to expiate,"[1] and one learns that this expiation took the form of a descent into the very lowest orders of English society, in order to personally experience the humiliation of social degradation.

Vagabond Years

When Orwell returned to England in 1927 and resigned his commission, the twenties were almost over. He claims to have returned with a newly-awakened social conscience, but it must be acknowledged that he was very much out of touch with the real situation in Britain at the time. Indeed, the major event in the history of England in the twenties - the General Strike - was an event with which Orwell was barely familiar, and which he never discusses anywhere in his published writings. Throughout the twenties Orwell was out of contact not only with socialist and working class movements, but also with the world of intellectuals and writers.

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[1] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 129.

Orwell was extremely anxious to become a writer himself, even though his early efforts in this direction had proved to be less than auspicious. However, whatever he may have lacked in native talent, he made up for with curiosity. The social conditions under which the majority of the population lived was not the first subject that interested Orwell. It was not even a curiosity about the working class as such that absorbed him in the years immediately following Burma - although, from his autobiographical account in The Road to Wigan Pier, that is what he would have us believe. In fact, for reasons more apparent to the psychologist than the historian, Orwell chose to experience and explore the world of that tiny portion of the population that lived at the very bottom of society. What he found in that world was a form of life that had very little in common with the world in which he moved. Indeed it had more to link it with the London underworld of the past than with the modern world.

Between 1927 and 1932 Orwell made several expeditions into the underworld of tramps, petty criminals and destitute. He explored the common lodging houses frequented by such people, the Salvation Army hostels, and other meeting-places of the homeless poor. Most of this activity took place in the East End of London.

Orwell's first experience of the vagabond classes was very obviously modelled on the similar exploits of Jack London, described in People of the Abyss (1903). As a boy Orwell had been impressed by this book,[1] and it seems likely that it provided him with a starting-point for his adventures.

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[1] Ibid.

By early 1928, Orwell was anxious to explore a little farther, and he decided to go to Paris. Since his mother's family was French, he was in some respect returning to his origins - in much the same way as he had done by choosing to go to Burma - but he seems to have avoided taking advantage of family connections, and barely visited his favourite aunt who was living in Paris at the time. The life he led in Paris was once again the life of the very poor, which he describes at length in Down and Out in Paris and London. Working sometimes as a 'plongeur' - the dishwasher and lowest in the hierarchy in the Paris restaurant business - and sometimes being unable to find any work at all, Orwell was often close to starvation. Yet he seems to have found these unpleasant conditions stimulating, for he apparently completed two novels and several short stories during his Paris stay, although all these works have since been lost. He seems to have had greater success with the kind of journalism at which he later excelled, for he produced several articles on Galsworthy, tramp life and the French press which appeared in both French and English publications. Not surprisingly, given his physical weakness for which he rarely made any allowances, he was at one point taken into hospital. Like all Orwell's experiences, even this was put to use, providing the material for the moving essay "How the Poor Die" (1946).

On returning from Paris Orwell worked as a tutor in Southwold, and in April 1932 took a full-time teaching post in a decrepit private school near London. He still continued to write, and his first book, Down and Out in Paris and London (1933) was published at the time when he was completing the manuscript for Burmese Days (1934). In 1933 he moved to another school, but his stay here was cut short by a period spent in hospital with pneumonia.

Orwell's two years of teaching, therefore, was his first experience of English life as it was led by a large section of the population. Orwell does not seem to have been favourably impressed by the meanness of this particular section of the middle class, as appears from his novel A Clergyman's Daughter (1935). He saw more of this section of society, however, when he worked in a London bookshop in 1934, and he describes his memories of this in Keep the Aspidistra Flying (1936). During these years Orwell also began to develop his abilities as a reviewer, writing regularly for the New English Weekly.

The Road to Orwellian Socialism

By 1936 Orwell had established something of a reputation in the literary world, and it was on the strength of this reputation and his vaguely left-wing sympathies that his publisher, Victor Gollancz, sent him on a mission to the north of England to collect information for a book which was to be published by the Left Book Club under the title The Road to Wigan Pier. This was the first encounter Orwell had had with the Depression, which had radically affected the industrial working class since the early twenties. Orwell's book happened to coincide with a general mood which was beginning to favour social surveys and analysis. The year 1936 was the year of the Barlow Report into the Distressed Areas, and it was also the year when the Bishop of York headed an inquiry on behalf of the Pilgrim Trust into the vastly different areas in Britain which had been hit by the unemployment.

Orwell's book was guaranteed a good market when it was published, but Gollancz was obviously rather uncertain about publishing so unorthodox a work under the aegis of the Left Book Club. In fact, it was only after having added his own extended Foreword in which he pointed out the weaknesses in Orwell's argument as he saw them, that he allowed the book to be published at all. From this Foreword one learns that Gollancz (and also, incidently, John Strachey and Harold Laski, the other members of the L.B.C. committee who agreed with Gollancz's criticisms) resented Orwell's flippant dismissal of the majority of Socialist and other eccentrics who swelled the ranks of the Left. Gollancz also resented Orwell's condemnation of the U.S.S.R. which he felt set an example to the rest of the world with its successful communist ownership of the means of production.

The contrast between Gollancz's views and Orwell's attitudes as they appear in this volume, reveals a good deal about the "Socialist" Left of the time. One suspects, for example, that Orwell was in the minority with his rejection of Moscow, and from Gollancz's apology at the beginning of the book one assumes that a greater number of the fashionable intellectual Left who made up the 38,000 membership of the Left Book Club were of the vegetarian-feminist-birth control fanatic mould which Orwell so vociferously insulted. At the same time one is not wholly convinced of the efficacy of Orwell's own brand of socialism. On this point, Gollancz's criticisms are valid:

> It is indeed significant that so far as I can remember (he must forgive me if I am mistaken) Mr. Orwell does not once define what he means by socialism; nor does he explain how the oppressors oppress nor even what he understands by the words "liberty" and "justice." I hope he will not think I am quibbling; he will not, I think, if he remembers that the word "Nazi" is an abbreviation of the words "National Socialist"; that in its first phase fascism draws its chief strength from an attack on "oppression" - "oppression" by capitalists, multiple stores, Jews and foreigners; that no

> word is commoner in German speeches today than "justice"; and that if you "listen in" any night to Berlin or Munich, the chances are that you will hear the "liberty" of totalitarian Germany - "Germans have become a united people" - compared with the misery of Stalin's slaves.[1]

Gollancz was, of course, quite right on this point. The transition from Socialism to Fascism was not a difficult one to make, particularly when the individual's origins did not lie with the oppressed. This transition had been made by Oswald Mosley who had been born into the upper classes, had entered Parliament as a Conservative, and moved over to the Labour benches, eventually rising to be a well-respected member of Macdonald's government. The frustration that followed the Cabinet and Party rejection of the Mosley Memorandum which offered an original almost Keynesian solution to the country's economic ills, drove Mosley into the arrogant stance of assuming he could form a party - The British Union of Fascists - which would offer a viable alternative to parliamentary democracy. From the widespread support Mosley won from the audiences which had previously cheered him as a socialist, it appears that many of the working classes themselves were similarly able to make the logical glissade from Socialism to Fascism without realising what they were doing.

Mosley's betrayal of the Left, and Orwell's indefinable socialism were very much signs of the times. When a Labour Government could overtly betray the principles of the Labour movement, and when most of the intellectuals of the Left could do little more than eulogize the U.S.S.R, the possible emergence of any left-wing alternative was unlikely.

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[1] Victor Gollancz, Foreword to Orwell, Wigan Pier.

Orwell himself lived a hand-to-mouth kind of socialism, and his responses to various issues were largely instinctive, dependent as much upon his emotional reactions as his intellect. His ideology included a vigorous rejection of war against the fascists, which was combined with a thorough dislike of pacifists, and a compassionate interest in the improvement of working class conditions. Even the most sympathetic reading of Orwell cannot reveal any consistent socialist philosophy.

Illustrative of the nature of Orwell's socialistic commitment is the period he spent in Spain from December 1936 until July 1937. Largely as a result of chance that he enrolled with the anarchist militia, the P.O.U.M., and was sent to the Huesca front in Catalonia. Although this contingent fought bravely against the Fascist forces, it nevertheless became the target of inter-necine rivalry between the Communists and Trotskyists. Since the P.O.U.M. was a Trotskyist-anarchist militia it soon found itself the victim of the more powerful Moscow-Communist faction centred in Barcelona. By the summer of 1937 the P.O.U.M. was liquidated, and Orwell was forced to leave Spain.

Orwell was deeply affected by his Spanish experience, and his indignation both with the Communists and with the English press who systematically mis-reported the news in favour of the Fascists is amply expressed in his book Homage to Catalonia (1938). From this book one learns that Orwell had been initially exhilerated to find that a near-egalitarian society was possible, for the Barcelona of the time of his arrival in Spain was just such a place; but his enthusiasm was soon replaced with disappointment with the rapid return of the class society in Barcelona.

The Spanish experience was certainly not calculated to strengthen Orwell's faith in left-wing movements. Yet he seems to have come to feel more strongly about his own kind of socialism, declaring in a letter to Cyril Connolly: "At last I really believe in Socialism, which I never did before."[1] Unfortunately he does not seem to have acquired a more precise notion of the kind of Socialism he now believed in, and one is led to assume that it was a socialism of the Utopian, romantic variety where everything is shared, and people treat one another as brothers. The early days in Barcelona would probably provide the model for the new society which Orwell envisioned.

The Spanish Civil War drastically affected the constitution of the Left. For some, such as Gollancz and Strachey, it provided the impetus for a swing to the right, which was further intensified after the revelations of the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement which finally destroyed the myth of Russian communism. For Orwell, horrified by the treachery in Spain where he had come so close to sacrificing his life (he had been shot through the neck in May 1937); a swing to the right was also inevitable, although his profoundly moral outlook prevented him from being influenced by Fascism. By the time the war had broken out his socialist guise had been replaced by a healthy patriotism.

The Patriotic Englishman

The thirties had certainly been a period of personality-shattering changes for Orwell, just as it had been for the whole of his generation.

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[1] Letter to Cyril Connolly, 8th June 1937, in Collected Essays, I, 301.

The values of the past which had seemed incorruptible were, by the end of the deacde, utterly decomposed; and people whose qualities had earlier seemed admirable had now offered their services to an evil foe. Orwell, in his inimitable style, summed up the thirties as follows:

> What a decade! A riot of appalling folly that suddenly becomes a nightmare; a scenic railway ending in a torture chamber. It starts off in the hang-over of the 'enlightened' post-war age, with Ramsay Macdonald soft-soaping into the microphone, and the League of Nations flapping vague wings in the background, and it ends up with twenty-thousand bombing planes darkening the sky and Himmler's masked executioner whacking women's heads off with a block borrowed from the Nuremburg museum. In between are the politics of the umbrella and the hand-grenade. The National Government coming in to 'save the pound,' Macdonald fading out like a Cheshire Cat, Baldwin winning an election in the disarmament ticket in order to rearm (and then failing to rearm), the June purge, the Russian purges, the glutinous humbug of the Abdication, the ideological mix-up of the Spanish war, Communists waving Union Jacks, Conservative M.P.'s cheering the news that British ships have been bombed, the Pope blessing Franco, Anglican dignitaries beaming at the wrecked churches of Barcelona, Chamberlain stepping out of his Munich aeroplane with a misquotation from Shakespeare, Lord Rothermere proclaiming Hitler as 'a great gentleman,' the London air-raid sirens blowing a false alarm as the first bombs drop on Warsaw . . . Mixed up with the buzz of conferences and the crash of guns are the day-to-day imbecilities of the gutter press. Astrology, trunk murders, the Oxford Groupers with their 'sharing' and their praying-batteries, the Rector of Stiffkey . . . photographed with naked female acquaintances, starving in a barrel and finally devoured by lions, James Douglas and his dog Bunch, Godfrey Winn with his yet more emetic dog and his political reflections ('God and Mr. Chamberlain - for I see no blasphemy in coupling these names'), spiritualism, the Modern Girl, nudism, dog racing, B.O., halitosis, night starvation, should a doctor tell?[1]

It is not surprising that Orwell should have found the period so bewildering. It had been, for him, a time of disillusion with the one cause to which he felt in any way attached - namely socialism. The final disappointment came with the outbreak of war, when he at last realised that a 'rejection of fascism and war' was no longer possible, and that it was necessary to make a stand. He chose to support Britain and the war she had decided to fight, and almost immediately offered his services to the recruiting boards. However, a man with such a poor medical history, with chronically weak lungs, who had been seriously wounded in Spain, was not considered suitable for active service, and he was, to his dismay, rejected. His wife Eileen, whom he had married in 1936, was given a Ministry position and was required to live in London, joining her husband at the small store they were running in Hertfordshire only at weekends.

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[1] Orwell, "The Limit of Pessimism," a review of Malcolm Muggeridge's The Thirties (1940), in Collected Essays, I, 587.

Orwell still continued writing. The tone of his writing had entirely changed, however, and by 1940 he was writing about England using the metaphor (which was hardly a socialist one) of: "a family with the wrong members in control."[1] One assumes therefore that the war crisis had brought to light the real Orwell - the patriotic Englishman - who, when the crunch came, would prefer to defend his native land rather than some vague political conviction.

The year 1940 was the beginning of a literary connection which was to last most of Orwell's remaining years. He began to make contributions to Tribune, and in 1942 became literary editor of that left-wing publication, which at the time was under the general editorship of

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[1] Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn" (1941), in Collected Essays, II, 88.

Aneurin Bevin. By all accounts he was not the perfect editor, for he was unable to make objective decisions, being often moved by compassion for a struggling reviewer to publish reviews that were second-rate. Prior to taking this literary editorship he had been Talks Producer of the India section of the B.B.C., a post he had held since the beginning of the war. Orwell showed a great deal of talent in preparing programmes suitable for an Indian audience, who required a fairly high academic level without too much expatiation of the idiosyncracies of English life. Also during these early war years Orwell contributed a London letter to an American left-wing publication, Partisan Review, and also wrote occasionally for the Observer. Altogether his literary output during the war years was substantial, although it consisted mainly of journalism.

The war was not an easy period for Orwell. Both he and his wife were heavily involved with work, and they had the added burden of an adopted son. They were also bombed out of their London apartment. In 1945 Eileen Blair died unexpectedly, and although Orwell did not allow his feelings to be expressed in front of his friends, there is good reason to believe that he was deeply disturbed by the event. Probably to ease his shock, he decided to visit Europe on behalf of the Manchester Evening News and the Observer, and was able to send back valuable dispatches, from Paris on V.E. Day, and from prisoner of war camps in Southern Germany, where he witnessed Jews treating Germans with much the same brutality as they themselves had been treated before by the Germans.[1]

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[1] Orwell, "Revenge is Sour," (1945), in Collected Essays IV, 22.

It is typical of Orwell's uncompromising moral stance that he should have condemned such behaviour in the same way as he had condemned, just a few years earlier, Nazi treatment of the Jews.

In 1945 Animal Farm, Orwell's fable depicting the totalitarian direction of all revolutions, was finally published. It had been written in 1943, but had not found a publisher at the time because of the war-time alliance with Russia, which the book was commonly held to satirise. This work, which will be discussed at length in Chapter VI, revealed a definite pessimism on Orwell's part with regard to the trend of socialist revolutions, and finally settled the question of his political affiliations. It was clear that his experience of the thirties and forties had left Orwell with the conclusion that nothing could be expected of conventional socialist movements, although he seems to have retained a glimmer of hope for the future.[1]

Orwell seems to have broadly concurred with the reforms brought about by the Labour Government after the war. Many of the Labour Party policies had, in fact, been recommended by Orwell during the early part of the war in his essays "The Lion and the Unicorn" (1941) and "The English People" (1943). All Orwell's recommendations involved more equitable distribution of wealth and services within the nation, which he felt could be brought about without violent revolution. This was very much the general direction of the post-war government.

By this time, however, Orwell had no longer much time to live. Although he had a tendency towards tuberculosis of the lungs he nevertheless took a house on the Scottish island of Jura, far from roads or centres of population; and for three years, until his health finally collapsed, Jura became his summer home. The spartan conditions were obviously detrimental to his health, but he seems to have enjoyed the life.

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[1] For further discussion of this point, see Chapter VI.

Jura was the setting in which Orwell wrote his final work, Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949). Again the predominant mood was one of pessimism with regard to political trends, and the final victory of totalitarianism over socialism. Much of the pessimism of this book can be attributed to Orwell's failing health; for example the physical effects of torture on Winston, which made him appear prematurely aged, could well be a description of Orwell's own physical decline.

Although he continued to write reviews in 1948 and 1949, Orwell was becoming increasingly unwell, and he was forced to spend most of his time in sanatoriums. His defiance of his physical condition and his inevitable early death showed itself one last time when, in October 1949 he married Sonia Brownell, an editorial assistant in the magazine Horizon. Three months later, on 21st January 1950, a few days before his planned departure for a Swiss sanatorium, Orwell died in University College Hospital after a sudden relapse.

CHAPTER III

THE UPPER CLASS

The Nature of the Class

The upper class is that tiny proportion of the population in whose hands the greater part of the wealth and power of the nation is concentrated. Although it is possible to delineate this class by reference to the criteria of wealth, power and status, in this study the class will be defined primarily in terms of the education it gives its children. A glance at the English social structure will be enough to indicate that there is a strong correlation between expensive preparatory schools and public schools, and between public schools and the ruling class.[1] The life of a fairly typical upper class individual would start with about five years at a preparatory school, succeeded by a further five years at a well-known public school. Entry to the higher echelons of government, the professions, and industry is then comparatively simple, particularly if education was concluded at either Oxford or Cambridge University; promotion is facilitated with the help of the Old Boy networks, which strengthen class solidarity in adulthood.

If this situation is still true today, then it was even more true in Orwell's time. Orwell has a great deal to contribute on the question of the relation between the character of the upper class and the education it affords its children. In addition, the material he offers does much to throw light on his own standpoint with regard to this class. However, before proceeding to his analysis, it is important to enquire first of all into the nature of Orwell's experience of the upper class, and secondly to make a note of the biases which, resulting from these experiences, would be likely to render his analysis less objective.

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[1] To cite an example of this fact: there were as many Old Etonians in the House of Commons in 1965 as there were in 1865, and Macmillan's government consisted almost entirely of this group.

Orwell's Experience of the Upper Class

Orwell is particularly well-qualified to discuss the upper class since he was educated first of all in a fashionable and expensive preparatory school, and afterwards at the most famous of all public schools, Eton. He was therefore in a position to make pertinent comments both on the upper class boys who attended these schools, and on the schools themselves. Moreover, his comments have an interesting dimension since Orwell's family was not in fact upper class. Orwell himself assessed his class as being 'lower upper middle class,' and he was in fact accepted at reduced fees at the fashionable preparatory school St. Cyprians because he was 'scholarship fodder.' Fortunately, he was able to satisfy his school by winning a scholarship to Eton where, as a Kings' Scholar, he was also required to pay less fees.

Orwell's criticism of the upper class is therefore not from the point of view of someone entirely committed to that class; yet at the same time his apparent objectivity has certain weaknesses. These weaknesses result from the fact that his parents' relative poverty was seen by Orwell as the reason for his being victimised. The humiliation seems to have permanently affected his personality. Orwell himself admits: "My own position was complicated, and in fact dominated by the fact that I had much less money than most of the other people around me."[1] Contemporaries of Orwell at Eton have tended to suggest that his sensitivity regarding his poverty was unnecessary, and that he exaggerated his victimisation. The writer and publisher Christopher Hollis, for example, has made the following comment on this bias in Orwell's writings:

> 'Probably the great cruelty one can inflict upon a child' wrote Orwell in Keep the Aspidistra Flying, 'is to send it to school with children richer than itself.' It is an absurd exaggeration. To one who sees things in proportion, it is not by any means an unmixed evil to be brought up in sufficiency but in the company of richer children.[2]

There is of course a certain element of truth in what Mr. Hollis has to say, but it should be added that he himself came from a much richer family and therefore could not have fully appreciated the pressures to which a child such as the young George Orwell was subjected. Justifiably or not, however, there is no doubt that this sensitivity, acquired at upper class schools, remained with Orwell throughout his life. An incident related by Richard Rees illustrates this:

> One day in 1948, when I had known him for eighteen years, I incautiously used the word 'Tug,' and although he was too polite to say anything, he winced as if I had trodden on his tenderest corn.[3]

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[1] Letter to Cyril Connolly, 14th Dec., 1938, Collected Essays, I, 400.

[2] Hollis, A Study of George Orwell, p. 21.

[3] Richard Rees, George Orwell (London: Secker and Warburg, 1961), p. 142.

The word 'tug' here refers to the 'togas' that used to be worn by Kings' Scholars at Eton. Orwell obviously felt sensitive to the fact that he was not paying full fees like the Oppidans who, as their name suggests, lived in the town. There was quite a social difference between Kings' Scholars who were separately housed in Eton College, and the rest of the school.

Being a Kings' Scholar would not, on its own, have been sufficient to create this acute sensitivity. The real cause of this must be sought in Orwell's early school years at St. Cyprians. This school was attempting to make a name for itself among the upper classes, since it had only recently been established. It managed to achieve its goal by winning scholarships to famous public schools for its pupils, which proved that its standards were high. The school was, therefore, a convenient means for the upward mobility of the nouveaux riches, as well as for those families, such as Orwell's, which had been downwardly mobile in the past, but which had nevertheless retained an upper class faith in public school education. It was an active policy of the school, however, to treat pupils in accordance with their wealth, which means that a child such as the young Orwell was given a difficult time. Orwell relates that he was constantly reminded by the Headmaster and his wife of his poverty. They discouraged him to take 'extras' such as carpentry and shooting, and dismissed his request for a cricket bat with the stark comment "Your parents could not afford it."[1] When he failed to work hard enough he was threatened with the unenviable future of being "a little office boy at forty pounds a year," a horrible possibility which apparently would have been unthinkable had his parents been richer.[1] This 'wealth snobbery' at St. Cyprians was not the only factor which conspired to make Orwell's prep school days a misery. His home background was, to a large extent, in conflict with the school, since Orwell had been used to a close family relationship with his mother and sisters, which would have been less likely had he been brought up in an upper class family with plenty of servants. The first few days at the school were therefore traumatic for the seven-year old boy. The shock expressed itself in bedwetting, punished with a flogging from the Headmaster,[2] something which Orwell never quite outlived, for it made him conscious of his isolation and his difference from the other boys around him.

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[1] Orwell, "Such, Such Were the Joys" (1947), in Collected Essays, IV, 388.

This, then, is Orwell's experience of upper class education. It is limited almost entirely to experience of upper class schools, since he never saw much of upper class domestic child-rearing customs. This is not, however, a serious deficiency, since the upper class customarily delegated such tasks, first to the nanny, and subsequently to the school. Orwell's writings show him to be an isolated individualist, over-sensitive to some practices he witnessed in upper class schools, but nevertheless perceptive of details of the upper class and their schools which would not be noticed by others who felt more at ease in those surroundings. Admittedly, Orwell's comments are in no way 'objective,' on the contrary, they are totally personal. But this fact in no way invalidates them. These comments, as they relate to upper class home culture, schooling and the resulting ruling class, can now be considered, although they must be seen from within the context of Orwell's personality.

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[1] Ibid., p. 391.

[2] Ibid., pp. 380-383.

Upper Class Home Culture

Upper class home life and culture do not belong to an area where Orwell had much experience, but he did realise that the upper class notion of family was in essence different from that of the middle or working class notion of 'nuclear' or 'extended' family. Family to the upper class, today as well as in Orwell's time, implies a continuity with past and future, symbolised by the family name, which is often associated with property. The upper class is highly bureaucratic;[1] everyone, including servants, have a role to play, and their activities do not bring them into much personal contact with one another. The child that is born into such a family is immediately relegated to a 'nanny.' After the age of about seven there is nobody sufficiently qualified to take over the supervision and education of the child, and for this reason, upper class parents decide that the time is right to send the child away from home to a boarding preparatory school, which will prepare the child for entrance into a public school. The upper class habit of sending their children - particularly the boys - to boarding schools, is central to their child-rearing habits, and shows that the upper class in fact only fully accept their children when the schools have formed them, and they are approaching adulthood. The schools serve the purpose of turning boys into men as fast as possible. Orwell himself recognised and thoroughly disliked this habit, as is indicated by his statement:

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[1] Ian Weinberg, The English Public Schools (New York: Atherton Press, 1967), p. 173.

> Boarding schools are worse than day schools. A child has a better chance with the sanctuary of its home near at hand. I think the characteristic faults of the upper and middle classes are partly due to the practice of sending children away from home as early as nine, eight, or even seven.[1]

Upper Class Schooling

On the subject of upper class schools, Orwell had considerably more to say. His comments on preparatory schools can be found almost exclusively in his long essay "Such, Such Were the Joys," while his comments on public schools are considerably less elaborate since he did not write a corresponding essay on his feelings about Eton. His comments on public schools have to be collected from throughout his works, and on the whole they do not manifest the same kind of bitterness that can be sensed from his memories of St. Cyprians. Cyril Connolly has made the comment that preparatory schools

> have all the faults of public schools without any of the compensations, without tradition, freedom, historical beauty, good teaching or communication between pupil and teacher. (They are) one of the few tortures confined to the ruling classes from which the workers are free.[2]

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[1] Orwell, "Such, Such Were the Joys," in Collected Essays, IV, 421.

[2] Cyril Connolly, Enemies of Promise (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1939), p. 206.

Orwell, writing to Connolly on the subject of the book from which this comment was taken, seems to have agreed with this attitude, as his concluding comment indicates: "I've always held that public schools aren't so bad, but people are wrecked by those filthy private schools long before they get to public school age."[1]

Yet although there was a tremendous qualitative difference between the two types of school, there nevertheless were a good many similarities. Private schools tended to take their model from the public schools, and imitated their disciplinary structure - investing authority in the Sixth Forms - as well as imitating public school curriculum, which emphasised classical studies.

Since the schools have so much in common, they will be dealt with together, although it will be necessary on occasion to point out the differences between public and preparatory schools, as they emerge from Orwell's writings. One convenient method for breaking down this wide topic is to consider, successively, the areas that might broadly be termed the climate of the school, the curriculum, and the teaching methods. Once these various aspects have been discussed, it will be possible to make some generalisations about Orwell's attitude to upper class education.

The general heading of 'school climate' encompasses a number of different considerations; notably the conventions of the schools which follow from their single-sexed nature. Also worthy of consideration is the snobbery of the schools, of which Orwell was particularly conscious; the enforced stoicism and finally the organisation of discipline and hierarchy within the schools. All these important aspects of upper class school life merit consideration.

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[1] Orwell, Letter to Cyril Connolly, 14th Dec. 1938, in Collected Essays, I, 401.

It is inevitable that problems should arise as a result of upper class schools being 'boarding' institutions, and also sexually exclusive. It has been already mentioned that Orwell resented the fact that the vast majority of upper class schools were boarding schools. He was careful to select day schools for his son Richard, and finally opted to send him to Westminster public school which was exceptional in being a day school.[1] The fact that upper class schools are for the most part boarding schools tends to bring about a very strong peer-group consciousness among the boys, and this bond forms an emotional surrogate for missed family bonds. In public schools, as Orwell himself experienced, the peer group was intensified by means of the election, or year-group, principle, whereby each election moved up the school together, developing a strong in-group loyalty, even though some individuals - such as Orwell - held themselves slightly aloof. The loyalty to the election survives even after the boys have left school, and old boys often help each other in later life. Even Orwell kept in contact with more of his contemporaries than would be expected of a person educated outside the public school system.

Both kinds of school, both preparatory and public, as well as the schools to which upper class girls are sent, are traditionally single-sexed. There are obvious administrative reasons for this, although the real explanation is probably that things have always been that way. For most of the year, therefore, an upper class boy is deprived almost completely of female company, while at the same time he is encouraged to develop strong emotional bonds with his peer group. It is not surprising that these conditions should often result in latent or concealed homosexuality, which is a theme which has been much discussed by ex-public school English writers. Connolly, who, it will be remembered, was at both the schools Orwell attended, gives a rather precious and affected account of his various love-affairs, including that with a certain rather ineffectual 'Nigel' who was presumably at Eton in Orwell's time.[1]

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[1] Orwell, Letter to Julian Symons, 16th June 1949, in Collected Essays, IV, 565.

Orwell himself makes some interesting comments on this aspect of boarding school life. He was somehow caught up in a scandal in St. Cyprians, although he was in fact quite innocent and totally ignorant of what homosexuality involved. As he describes the incident, the main offender, Horne, was flogged for a quarter of an hour before being expelled, while all those others who had been implicated were given a severe lecture. As Orwell recalls:

> Guilt hung in the air like a pall of smoke. A solemn black-haired imbecile of an assistant master, who was later to become a member of Parliament, took the older boys to a secluded room and delivered a talk on the Temple of the Body.
>
> 'Don't you realise what a wonderful thing your body is?' he said gravely. 'You talk of your motor car engines, your Rolls Royces and Daimlers and so on. Don't you understand that no engine ever made is fit to be compared with your body? And then you go and wreck it, ruin it, for life!'

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[1] Connolly, Enemies of Promise, p. 2.

> He turned his cavernous black eyes on me and added quite sadly: 'And you, whom I'd always believed to be quite a decent person after a fashion - you, I hear, are one of the worst.'
>
> A feeling of doom descended on me. So I was guilty too. I too had done the dreadful thing, whatever it was, that wrecked your life, body and soul, and ended up with suicide or the lunatic asylum . . .[1]

The scandal apparently went on for several days, and Orwell's class, which was by then quite high up in the school, was quite unjustifiably held responsible for 'leading the younger boys astray.' Strange accusations were made by the Headmistress (nicknamed Flip):

> 'Have you looked in the glass lately, Beacham? said Flip. 'Aren't you ashamed to go about with a face like that? Do you think everyone doesn't know what it means when a boy has black rings round his eyes?'[2]

Orwell only learned later that this was a sure sign of a masturbator, but at the time he was worried by these insinuations, and he carefully examined his face in the mirror every day, looking for the fatal marks.

The method used by the staff of St. Cyprians to deal with the problem of homosexuality was, and is, typical of schools that sort. In a boarding school it is impossible for the staff to maintain full-time supervision of the boys' activities, and therefore homosexuality has to be punished on the scapegoat principle.[3] No doubt it often occurs, as in this case, that the innocent are punished with the guilty. From his other writings it appears that Orwell thoroughly disapproved of homosexuality, both as it existed in upper class boarding schools, and as it existed in the hostels and lodging-houses of the down-and-outs.

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[1] Orwell, "Such, Such Were the Joys," in Collected Essays, IV, 403.

[2] Ibid., p. 405.

[3] Weinberg, Public Schools, p. 108.

Orwell seems to have resented this consequence of the structure of the schools, and was hoping to avoid those weaknesses as far as the education of his son was concerned. An excessive emphasis on the peer group and the consequent homosexuality of the upper class schools seems to have offended his sense of 'common decency,' and his faith in the institution of the family.

A factor of public and preparatory school life which was perhaps just as inevitable was the snobbery which pervaded the schools. This was an aspect of upper class schools that Orwell thoroughly disliked, as appears from his accusation that the schools were "festering centres of snobbery."[1] This snobbery, as described by Orwell, took two forms, the snobbery of rank, and the snobbery of wealth. In a newly-established institution such as St. Cyprians, rank-snobbery was the more significant of the two, since the school lacked pedigree. St. Cyprians was anxious to attract the patronage of the more established upper class, as can be seen from Orwell's descriptions of the almost reverential treatment by the Headmistress of the two titled boys in the school. Orwell points out that 'Flip' was always careful to address these boys by their titles, especially if visitors were present. Unfortunately there is nothing to indicate that these little aristocrats were particularly worthy of such prestige, for they were not particularly impressive individuals. One of them, as Orwell described him, was particularly pathetic: "a wretched drivelling little creature, almost an albino, peering upwards out of weak eyes, with a long nose, at the end of which a dewdrop always seemed to be trembling."[1]

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[1] Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn" (1941), in Collected Essays, II, 121.

Orwell himself was obviously not very impressed with the aristocracy per se. He was, indeed, unwilling to spare his readers the revolting farce of this albino child having a choking fit over his dinner plate, which was dealt with by the Headmistress in the 'boys will be boys' spirit, while, Orwell assures us, "any lesser person would have been called a dirty little beast and ordered out of the room instantly."[2]

Connected with this snobbery of rank was the Scottish cult, although it seems likely that this was a particular idiosyncracy of St. Cyprians. Orwell relates that Scotland was, at that time, a fashionable place for spending summer vacations, and the Headmistress, who claimed Scottish ancestry, encouraged the Scottish boys to wear their ancestral kilts.[3] Once again, this was a caprice that Orwell thoroughly disliked, and it probably explains his apparently irrational dislike of Scotland in later life.[4] The Scottish cult, like so many other foibles of St. Cyprians, permanently affected Orwell's outlook on life.

This snobbery of rank would probably not be quite so official at Eton where, in any case, the titled nobility would not be so thin on the ground. Orwell has no comments to make on this point, but his critics, notably Hollis, have argued that such snobbery was minimal in Eton. As part of his argument to prove this point, Hollis has made a statement in which he involuntarily seems to suggest that snobbery in fact took on a different and new form:

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[1] Orwell, "Such, Such Were the Joys," in Collected Essays, IV, 384.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 409.

[4] Orwell, Letter to Rayner Heppenstall, 16th April 1940, in Collected Essays, II, 37.

> Eton is about as completely classless a society within itself as can be imagined. The Etonian of my day was childishly arrogant about anyone who was not at Eton - Marlburians, Hottentots, barrow-boys, Americans, and what-have-you were beyond the pale. But his arrogance meant that anyone who was at Eton was accepted.[1]

This form of snobbery, the Etonian sense of superiority, is not specifically referred to by Orwell, although it seems likely that he would have argued against Hollis's assertion that "everyone in Eton was accepted."

The second form of snobbery discussed by Orwell was the one that greatly affected his self-image, namely that of wealth snobbery. However, the fact that he himself had been so humiliated because of his relative poverty does not mean that his descriptions of the cruel treatment of less wealthy children was necessarily fictitious. There is no reason to assume that interrogations such as the one described below did not actually take place:

> 'How much a year has your pater got? What part of London do you live in? Is that Knightsbridge or Kensington? How many bathrooms has your house got? How many servants do your people keep? Have you got a butler? Well then have you got a cook? Where do you get your clothes made? How many shows did you go to in the hols? How much money did you bring back with you? etc., etc.[2]

Orwell describes how an eight-year-old boy tried to lie his way through such a catechism:

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[1] Hollis, A Study of George Orwell, p. 21.

[2] Orwell, "Such, Such Were the Joys," in Collected Essays, IV, 410.

> 'Have your people got a car?'
> 'Yes'
> 'What sort of car?'
> 'Daimler'
> 'How many horse power?'
> (Pause and leap in the dark) 'Fifteen'
> 'What kind of lights?'
> The little boy is bewildered.
> 'What kind of lights? Electric or acetylene?'
> (A longer pause and another leap in the dark) 'Acetylene'
> 'Coo! He says his pater's car got acetylene lamps.
> They went out years ago. It must be as old as the hills.'[1]

This snobbery of wealth was consciously encouraged by the Headmaster and his wife, who deliberately humiliated the poorer boys by scolding them publicly if they attempted to buy expensive things. Even pocket money was used as a means to differentiate the rich from the poor. Orwell recollects:

> There was also the question of pocket money which we took out in sweets, despatched by Flip from a large table. The millionaires had sixpence a week, but the normal sum was threepence. I and one or two others were given twopence. My parents had not given instructions to this effect, and the saving of a penny a week could not conceivably make any difference to them: it was a mark of status.[2]

This official patronage of wealth snobbery was so successful that, as Orwell recalls, it affected almost everyone in the school:

> Even if I had not learned it from Flip and Sambo, I would have learned it from the other boys. Looking back, it is astonishing how intimately, intelligently snobbish we all were, how knowledgeable about names and addresses, how swift to detect small differences in accents, manners, and the cut of clothes.[3]

At Eton there was obviously no such official patronage of wealth snobbery, but since Eton was so much better established as an upper class school it had no need to overemphasise wealth, since such an obsession is probably far more of a middle class characteristic. Snobbery, therefore, appears to be an aspect of the climate of upper class schools which takes different forms in different institutions.

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 389.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 408.

A third sub-category of the climate of the school which merits consideration is stoicism which, in contrast to snobbery, would appear to remain qualitatively the same in all upper class schools. Stoicism as described by Orwell, takes two forms: emphasis on sport, and enforced asceticism with regard to food and general living conditions. The justification cited for this stoicism is that it cultivates physical toughness in the boys, who, under a regime of dull food and cold showers, are supposed to scorn the soft life. Sport is claimed to be the means of impressing upon the boys the virtues of team spirit, and the importance of leadership. Orwell relates that sport at St. Cyprians was a daily ritual which was carried on under all kinds of conditions: "There was the daily nightmare of football - the cold, the mud, the hideous greasy ball that came whizzing at one's face, the gouging knees and the trampling boots of the bigger boys."[1]

Public school games are characteristically rough. Rugby football was, after all, first played in a public school, and Orwell himself, at Eton, excelled at the singularly rough game known as the Wall Game. The rules and aims of these games have been described by Stansky and Abrahams. It consists of:

> a kind of scrimmage or rough house played between two teams interlocked in deep mud alongside a brick wall, 110 yards

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 396.

> in length - the actual playing area is 120 yards by 5, the object being to score goals at one end throwing the ball against a garden door, and at the other end against a mark on a tree.[1]

Goals are apparently quite rare, since any defensive tactics are allowed, so it was quite an extraordinary event when Orwell actually made a goal, in 1921, although it is characteristic of him that he should never have referred to this triumph in his writings. Every public school has its own sporting traditions, comparable to that of the Wall Game, and quite probably the games are universally rough. Since Orwell voluntarily participated in this game it is impossible to suggest that he might have been hostile to sport in principle, although from his comments on the enforced games at St. Cyprians it would appear that he was angered by the way the health of the boys was put in jeopardy. Ailments such as colds often resulted in bad weather, and were particularly dangerous for children such as the young Orwell who had congenitally weak lungs. There was very little sympathy for the boys who happened to fall ill after such activities. Colds and "wheeziness" were either diagnosed as "imagination" or were looked upon as essentially "a moral disorder caused by over-eating."[2]

The other form of stoicism was the deprivation endured by the pupils, both from the point of view of the food they were given and the general living conditions. It is suspiciously likely that the real reason for all this was the desire on the part of the school to save money, but leaving aside such speculation, there is no doubt that St.

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[1] Stansky and Abrahams, The Unknown Orwell, p. 99.

[2] Orwell, "Such, Such Were the Joys," in Collected Essays, IV, 396.

Cyprians was an exceedingly uncomfortable place. As Orwell remembered:

> A characteristic memory of St. Cyprians is the astonishing hardness of one's bed on the first night of term. Since this was an expensive school, I took a social step up by attending it, and yet the standard of comfort was in every way far lower than in my own home, or, indeed, than it would have been in a prosperous working class home. One only had a hot bath once a week, for instance. . . . It is not easy for me to think of my schooldays without seeming to breath a whiff of something cold and evil smelling - a sort of compound of sweaty stockings, dirty towels, faecal smells blowing along corridors, forks with old food between the prongs, neck of mutton stew, and the banging doors of the lavatories and the echoing chamber pots in the dormitories.[1]

The cold, barren conditions might have seemed less offensive if the food had been good, or at least tolerable. This was hardly the case, and Orwell, who seems to have had a particularly vivid memory as far as this was concerned, conveys an impression of the school meals to his readers with the use of careful detail: "The porridge itself contained more lumps, hairs and unexplained black things than one would have thought possible, unless someone was putting them there on purpose."[2] Not only was the food unappetising, it was also inadequate, and pupils such as Orwell had to find alternative - often illicit - means of subsidising their diet:

> The food was not only bad, it was insufficient. Never before or since have I seen butter or jam spread so thinly on bread. I do not think I can be imagining the fact that we were underfed, when I remember the lengths we would go to in order to steal food. On a number of occasions I remember creeping down at two or three o'clock in the morning through what seemed like miles of pitch dark stairways and passages . . . to steal bread from the pantry.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 398

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 397.

Life at upper class schools was made unpleasant not only by the snobbery and stoicism, but also by the strict discipline. Rules were numerous and the punishments for infringing them were corporal, usually involving a beating from the Sixth Form or the Headmaster. The Sixth Form at St. Cyprians - that is, boys of about twelve or thirteen - had the right to beat younger offenders. Indeed, the Headmistress threatened the young Orwell with a beating from the Sixth Form if he persisted with his unfortunate bed-wetting.[1] As it turned out, Orwell's continued offences in this regard were punished by no less a person than 'Sambo,' the Headmaster, and the experience, as Orwell describes it, was a humiliating one:

> Sambo knew, of course, why I had been sent to him, and had already taken a bone-handled riding crop out of the cupboard, but it was part of the punishment of reporting yourself that you had to proclaim your offences with your own lips. When I had said my say, he read me a short but pompous lecture, then seized me by the scruff of my neck, twisted me over and began beating me with the riding crop. He had a habit of continuing his lecture while he flogged you, and I remember the words 'you dir-ty lit-tle boy' keeping time with the blows. The beating did not hurt (perhaps, as it was the first time he was not hitting me very hard) and I walked out feeling much better. The fact that the beating had not hurt was a sort of victory, and partially wiped out the shame of the bed-wetting.[2]

Orwell has left no record of his experiences of corporal punishment at Eton, although it is certain that as a 'fag' who was required to run errands for the older boys, he would have been beaten by them from time to time. Most of the beatings would have come from the senior election, since, as Connolly informs us,[1] the masters did not have the right to beat the boys - they could only punish them with detentions. Although Orwell has not written of his objections to the principle of beating as it was practiced among the boys (and which has an obvious link with homosexuality), nevertheless it would appear from the descriptions of Orwell's schooldays as recorded by his contemporaries that the young Orwell favoured a liberalisation of discipline without any actual abolition of the disciplinary structure. When his election reached the top of the school hierarchy, it carried out a policy of leniency and liberal rule, uncharacteristic of the regimes before and after. Stansky and Abrahams illustrate this point with a quote from a member of Orwell's election:

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[1] Ibid., p. 380.

[2] Ibid., p. 381.

> When I was a fag it was considered a poor night for the seniors if no-one was beaten, and wantings [that is, summons] occurred every night, whereas this last half it does not happen to have been necessary to use corporal punishment at all, scarcely a dozen or twenty wantings in the whole half. . . . It is early yet to judge the success of these experiments, and the universal prediction of the old men may be verified, but I can at least honestly record that College has been in every way happier this year than at any time in the last six years.[2]

Orwell certainly played his part in this liberalisation process, but one nevertheless searches in vain in his writings to find a condemnation of the principle of flogging, although the beating of one boy by another, with the concurrence of the school authorities, would be regarded with horror by people outside the upper class school system.

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[1] Connolly, Enemies of Promise, p. 233.

[2] Stansky and Abrahams, The Unknown Orwell, p. 111.

In upper class schools, physical punishment is incorporated into the hierarchical school structure.[1] Orwell has failed to comment on this subject, but the very absence of comment by a writer who, in other circumstances, was so conscious of exploitation of one man by another, may prove to shed light on his basic attitudes.

The upper class school hierarchy, which in itself mimics the social structure of the world outside, and which consequently trains the boys for leadership in a class-structured society, serves some rather obvious functions. Primarily, the hierarchical system administered by the senior students relieves the administration of a good deal of responsibility, while at the same time it integrates potential trouble-makers by providing them with quite considerable power. Eton and the other famous public schools have had their hierarchical structures and disciplinary systems imitated, although modified, by preparatory schools, and indeed by the educational system as a whole. Since the rigid structure is so closely tied to the concept of elite education, and since

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[1] Connolly describes Eton College society in the following way: The seventy Eton scholars (i.e. Kings' Scholars) lived together in a house, part Victorian, part medieval, where they were ruled by the Master in College, who had under him the Captain of the School, and nine other members of the sixth form, who wore stick-up collars, could cane and have fags. The boys were divided into elections, according to the year in which they won their scholarship; the elections moved slowly up the school, *en bloc*, and each represented a generation.

Below the top twenty came another thirty boys or so, who formed the bulk of college, and then the bottom twenty, about fifteen of whom were doing their compulsory year of fagging, and who, while the others had rooms, lived in cubicles in Chamber. The whole school, run in theory by the sixth form, and the Captain of the School, was governed by Pop, or the Eton Society, an oligarchy of two dozen boys who, except for two or three *ex officio* members, were self-elected and could wear stick-up collars, coloured waistcoats etc. and caneboys from

Orwell was so deeply committed to the cause of 'classlessness' - at least in the years before and just after the outbreak of war - his failure to comment on this aspect of upper class school life can be seen to be quite significant.

Not only does Orwell make interesting comments on the climate of upper class schools, he also offers some pertinent criticisms of curriculum and teaching methods in upper class schools. One aspect of the curriculum which Orwell saw as being of special importance was religious training. He describes the religion taught in St. Cyprians as "low church Bible Christianity" which preached "sex puritanism, insistence on hard work, respect for academic distinction, disapproval of self-indulgence."[1] This particular form of Christianity conforms very closely with what has come to be known as the 'Protestant work ethic,' usually associated with the middle class. It is not surprising that St. Cyprians should, in this respect, be middle class, since it had only recently been established and its pupils came from the rich middle classes, although these pupils, by virtue of their education, would in later years be accepted into the upper class. Orwell described the special make-up of the school in the following way:

> Most of them were the children of rich parents, but on the whole they were the un-aristocratic rich, the sort of people who live in huge shrubberied houses in Bournemouth or Richmond, and who have cars and butlers but not country estates.[2]

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any house. The masters could not cane . . . In practice Eton was not a democracy for the system was feudal.
(Connolly, Enemies of Promise, pp. 232-233.

[1] Orwell, "Such, Such Were the Joys," in Collected Essays, IV, 407.

[2] Ibid., p. 384.

In its religious attitude, as also in its exaggerated wealth-snobbery, St. Cyprians still bore the traces of its middle class origins. Its rather paradoxical position revealed itself in an ideology which combined a distinctly middle-class religion with an upper-class emphasis on status, described by Orwell as a

> contempt for braininess, and worship of games, contempt for foreigners and the working class, an almost neurotic dread of poverty, and, above all, the assumption not only that money and privilege are the things that matter, but that it is better to inherit them than to work for them.[1]

Orwell quite justifiably felt that "the various ideals . . . cancelled out," although he was correct in assuming that what mattered, for practical purposes, was not what you did, but what you were.

Public schools, which had a closer, more long-standing association with the upper class than schools such as St. Cyprians, did not manifest such a conflict of ideology. The Christianity that Orwell encountered in Eton was of the high-church variety, which had a convenient in-built tendency to sanctify hierarchy and the status quo. Sermons preached in Eton Chapel would have conformed to the pattern still common today, taking inspiration from such passages as: "So then, brethren, stand fast, and hold to the traditions which ye were taught."[2] Orwell was evidently not particularly impressed by this kind of preaching, and was at no time in his life particularly religious. It is particularly significant that his only substantial discussion of religion comes in a novel concerned with the loss of faith.[1] He obviously did not approve of the established church in all its manifestations, although, like so many Anglicans, he was unwilling to denounce the church out of hand; and he certainly did not take issue with the form religion took in public schools.

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[1] Ibid., p. 407.

[2] Actually preached by the Bishop of Lichfield at the 1962 Commemoration service at Shrewsbury public school, quoted in Weinberg, Public Schools, p. 56.

With regard to the central features of upper class school curriculum - namely, the classics - Orwell was, on the other hand, prepared to make firm criticisms. The core of upper class academic training, in preparatory schools, public schools, and in Oxford and Cambridge, had been the study of Latin and Greek language and literature. This course of study provided the upper class with the useless but prestigious accomplishment by which pertinent Latin or Greek quotations could be cited at every occasion, at a garden party, in a novel, or during a House of Commons speech. Orwell himself obviously hated classical studies, as is indicated by his description of his satisfaction on discovering that the Caliph Omar destroyed the libraries of Alexandria; he was, to quote his own words, "filled with enthusiastic approval. It was so many less words to look up in the dictionary."[2] Yet Orwell did not condemn the teaching of classics on the grounds that it adds to the mystique of the upper class. He criticism was altogether from a different angle - he felt that the time spent in teaching dead languages could be more usefully spent in other ways. As he pointed out,

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[1] A Clergyman's Daughter (1936).

[2] Orwell, "As I Please," 7th July 1944, in Collected Essays, III, 210.

> Classical education is going down the drain at last, but even now there must be far more adults who have been flogged through the entire extant works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Vergil, Horace, and various other Latin and Greek authors than have read the English masterpieces of the eighteenth century.[1]

Those who took classical study seriously were, by definition, out of touch with the real world, as far as Orwell was concerned. He makes this point with the characterisation of Porteous, the retired classics master, in his novel Coming Up for Air. Porteous is a rather endearing bachelor, living in lodgings, having spent his lonely life teaching in public schools (masters were not encouraged to marry), and finding compensation in classical literature. George Bowling, the hero of the novel, found Porteous in some rather important ways an unsatisfactory confidant, since he could see the present only as a rather poor imitation of the vibrant world of Greece and Rome, and was unable to appreciate the seriousness of the international situation in the nineteen-thirties. Bowling summed up Porteous' attitude as follows:

> Hitler and Stalin will pass away, but something which Porteous calls the 'eternal verities' will remain. This, of course, is simply another way of saying that things will always go on exactly as he's known them. For ever and ever, cultivated Oxford blokes will stroll up and down studies full of books, quoting Latin tags and smoking good tobacco out of jars with coats of arms on them.[2]

Orwell felt that classical education was out of date, and should be replaced by more modern concerns such as English literature, or science. Yet science, as far as public schools were concerned, had always smacked of the lower orders, being deemed merely practical training; only the classics provided true education.[1] Orwell himself had a lifetime interest in nature study and science, which seems to have had its early manifestations in St. Cyprians, where he was occasionally able to escape with a master called Brown, for an afternoon of butterfly hunting on a nearby common. The memories of these expeditions are some of the few happy recollections of St. Cyprians that Orwell records:

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Orwell, Coming Up for Air (1939), p. 161.

> The ride of two or three miles on a lonely little branch line, the afternoon of charging to and fro with large green nets, the beauty of the enormous dragonflies which hovered over the tops of the grasses, the sinister killing bottle with its sickly smell, and then tea in the parlour of a pub, with large slices of pale-coloured cake![2]

As might be expected, these expeditions were not favourably received in school, and were often the subject of sneers from the Headmistress:

> 'And have you been catching little butterflies?' she would say with a vicious sneer when one got back, making her voice as babyish as possible. From her point of view, natural history ('bug-hunting' she would probably have called it), was a babyish pursuit which a boy should be laughed out of as soon as possible. Moreover it was somehow faintly plebian, it was traditionally associated with boys who wore spectacles and were no good at games, it did not help you to pass exams, and above all it smelt of science and therefore seemed to menance classical education.[3]

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[1] An illustration of this attitude can be found in Thomas Hughes's Tom Brown's Schooldays, in the portrayal of Martin, nicknamed Madman, who collected all kinds of birds and animals, and conducted often violent experiments in his study. "Martin was one of those unfortunates, who were at that time of day (and are I fear still) quite out of place in a public school. If we knew how to use our boys, Martin would have been seized upon and educated as a natural philosopher. He had a passion for birds, beasts, flowers and insects, and knew more of them and their habits than anyone in Rugby, except perhaps the Doctor, who knew everything." (Thomas Hughes, Tom Brown's Schooldays, p. 223)

[2] Orwell, "Such, Such Were the Joys," in Collected Essays, IV, 395.

[3] Ibid.

When he entered Eton, Orwell opted to take the science course, which was the option generally taken by the less intelligent; the more proficient took the classical course. Orwell did not excel even with this choice, probably because he did not make the necessary effort; but nevertheless he retained a life-long interest in science, particularly natural science, as can be seen from his sensitive and extremely well-informed article entitled "The Common Toad."[1]

Aside from questions of curriculum, Orwell also had criticisms to make of the teaching methods employed in such schools as St. Cyprians. Since the pupils were entered for public examinations, it was necessary to force the boys to learn as many facts as possible, although this was done with very little concern for what was taught. As Orwell describes:

> Who plundered the Begams? Who was beheaded in an open boat? Who caught the Whigs bathing and ran away with their clothes? Almost all our history teaching was on this level. History was a series of unrelated, unintelligible but - in some way that was never explained to us - important facts with resounding phrases attached to them.[2]

Orwell quite clearly made the assumption that a reform of upper class school curriculum would have to be combined with a reform of teaching methods.

From his comments on these various aspects of public and preparatory school life - the climate of the schools, the curriculum and the teaching methods - a general picture of Orwell's overall feelings towards these schools begins to emerge. It is a picture which includes a good many unpleasant, even vulgar, aspects of school life, but at the same time one that is drawn with a certain sympathy. Orwell could not have had too much hostility to public schools, since he chose to send his son to one. His article "For Ever Eton,"[1] written a year or so before his death, similarly shows that he had no real quarrel with the public schools; for in that article he states that his only regret was that Eton had not moved with the times (it still retained its special dress). He congratulates the school for its preservation of student freedoms, which allows so much individuality to be expressed. From this article, and indeed from all Orwell's writings on upper class schools, it is difficult to make the inference that Orwell had any objection to the principle of the existence of special upper class schools.

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[1] Orwell, "The Common Toad," in Collected Essays, IV, 171.

[2] Orwell, "Such, Such Were the Joys," in Collected Essays, IV, 386.

The Upper Class as a Product of Education

This sympathy for upper class schooling is evident also in Orwell's treatment of the products of the schools, namely the upper class itself. Orwell was careful, in this regard, not to equate the upper or ruling classes with aristocracy:

> England has no real aristocracy. The race difference on which aristocracy is usually founded was disappearing by the end of the middle ages, and the famous medieval families have almost completely died out. The so-called old families are those which grew rich in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Moreover, the notion that nobility exists in its own right, that you can be a nobleman even if you are poor, was already dying out in the age of Elizabeth, a fact commented on by Shakespeare.[2]

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[1] Orwell, "For Ever Eton," Observer, Aug. 1st, 1948.

[2] Orwell, "The English People," in Collected Essays, III, 34.

But it did not follow from the fact that there was no aristocracy in England that there was also no ruling class, as Orwell was careful to point out:

> And yet, curiously enough, the English ruling class has never developed into a bourgeoisie plain and simple. It has never become purely urban or frankly commercial. The ambition to be a country gentleman, to own and administer land and draw at least part of your income from rent, has survived every change. So it comes that each new wave of parvenus, instead of simply replacing the existing ruling class, has adopted its habits, intermarried with it, and after a generation or two, become indistinguishable from it.[1]

It was this very process that was taking place in St. Cyprians. Only by adopting upper class habits and ideology could the school ever win the prestige it sought.

According to Orwell, the upper class asserts its power by controlling the government and finance of the country:

> In England it is not merely the ownership of property that is concentrated in a few hands. It is also the case that all power, administrative as well as financial, belongs to one class. Except for a handful of 'self-made men' and Labour politicians, those who control our destinies are the product of about a dozen public schools and two universities.[2]

This situation had functioned well in the past, for Orwell felt that, particularly at the height of the Empire - before the telegraph revolutionised Imperial administration - the ruling class had functioned quite efficiently. However, since that time, changes had taken place, and the ruling class, unable to adapt, had survived with its power intact but no longer with any ability to rule; to put this in Orwell's words

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 50.

"one of the dominant facts of English life in the last three quarters of a century is the decay of the ability of the ruling class."[1] In his characteristically extravagant way, Orwell denounced the rulers of Britain:

> And yet somehow the ruling class decayed, lost its ability, its daring, finally even its ruthlessness, until a time came when stuffed shirts such as Eden or Halifax could stand out as men of exceptional talent. As for Baldwin, one could not even dignify him with the name of stuffed shirt. He was simply a hole in the air. The mishandling of England's domestic problems during the nineteen-twenties had been bad enough, but British foreign policy between 1931 and 1939 is one of the wonders of the world.[2]

Despite these accusations, Orwell does not seem to have hated the upper class with the fervour of a revolutionary. Portrayals of the upper class in his novels seem to suggest an amused sympathy, perhaps best illustrated in his characterisation of Sir Thomas Hare in A Clergyman's Daughter:

> Sir Thomas Hare was a widower, a good-hearted, chuckle-headed man of about sixty-five, with an obtuse, rosy face and curling moustaches. He dressed by preference in checked overcoats and curly-brimmed bowler hats that were at once dashingly smart and out of date. At a first glance he gave the impression of having carefully disguised himself as a cavalry major of the nineties, so that you could hardly look at him without thinking of devilled bones with a b and an s, and the tinkling of hansom bells, and the Pink'Un in its great 'pitcher'days, and Lottie Collins, and 'Tarara-BOOM-deay.' But his chief characteristic was an abysmal mental vagueness. He was one of those people who say 'Don't you know?' and 'What! What!' and lose themselves in the middle of sentences. When he was puzzled or in difficulties, his moustaches seemed to bristle forward, giving the appearance of a well-meaning but exceptionally brainless prawn.[3]

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[1] Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn," in Collected Essays, II, 89.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Orwell, A Clergyman's Daughter (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 170.

Sir Thomas represents all the inbred, comical incompetence of the ruling class, and yet Orwell's portrayal of him is hardly vicious. In fact, in Orwell's analysis of English politics there seems to be a constant assertion of the moral integrity of the ruling class, which co-existed with its incompetence: "the ruling class can't, in my opinion, produce a totalitarianism of their own. Not to put it on any other grounds, they are too stupid."[1] Orwell knew the upper classes too intimately to want to accuse it of total moral corruption. Whenever he knew anything or anyone well, he was unable to give just one side of the picture; only when he was unfamiliar with a cause or an individual could he make a wholesale condemnation.

Evaluation

It appears from this brief survey of Orwell's attitude towards the upper class, their home culture and their schools, that Orwell was not, fundamentally, hostile to these institutions. This is shown in the light-hearted way in which he treats his subject, and the criticisms he makes, which are essentially concerned with superficials, and which do not question the fundamental 'decency' (a very important concept for Orwell) of the class. For example, Orwell felt that homosexuality could be cured simply by making upper class schools into day establishments. He had a considerable amount to say about snobbery, but only the internal snobbery of wealth and title; he had nothing to say about the snobbery of public schools over other schools. He fiercely criticised the bad food and poor conditions of St. Cyprians, but he made no real criticism of that other aspect of public school stoicism, the sport ethic. Apart from his description of the flogging he received from the Headmaster for bed-wetting (which he admits seemed to have cured him), he had nothing to say about the widespread use of corporal punishment administered by senior boys. Similarly, he had nothing to say about the hierarchical system in preparatory and public schools, even though it often led to exploitation. At the end of his essay "Such, Such Were the Joys," after having described the full horrors of his life at St. Cyprians, he takes the force out of his argument by acknowledging that since his time there had been "a vast change of outlook" whereby many of the unnecessary impositions had been removed - all in all, "the whole status of children has vastly improved."[1] Even official religion, by the nineteen-thirties was less influential: "religious belief has largely vanished, dragging other kinds of nonsense after it."[2] It was quite obvious also that classical education was gradually losing ground, to be replaced by a more modern curriculum; and in the same way it must have been clear to Orwell that the criticisms he made of upper-class teaching methods were also tending to become rather dated by the time he wrote his essay.

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[1] Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn," in Collected Essays, II, 145.

Just as his criticism of education is strictly superficial, so also is Orwell's criticism of the upper class itself not an attack of any real significance. He nowhere challenges the principle of upper-class rule and his only complaint is that the upper class was no longer ruling efficiently, having become something of a caricature of its former self. In sum, it appears from the evidence that has been collected on this subject, that Orwell was unable to dissociate himself sufficiently from the upper class in order to condemn either the class, or the education by which it maintained itself.

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[1] Orwell, "Such, Such Were the Joys," in Collected Essays, IV, 418.

[2] Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

THE MIDDLE CLASSES

The Nature of the Class

Since Orwell's times there have been some substantial changes in the constitution of the middle class. Today the middle class is commonly assumed to encompass the greater part of society - particularly in North America - to the extent that it dominates not only the political but also the cultural life of the nation. The middle class in England in Orwell's time, during the inter-war years, was less absolute. Admittedly, the 'new middle class' of the post-industrial world was beginning to emerge; indeed Orwell can be credited with recognising the potential of this class at a time when it was only a minor social force. Orwell realised that this class had very little in common with the old middle classes; and for this reason discussion of this new class will be deferred until Chapter VI, which deals with the future as Orwell envisioned it.

A point which strikes the observer of the middle classes of the inter-war period is the number of diverse groupings which qualify for 'middle class' status. These groups existed independently of one another, sharing in common little more than their intermediate social standing. Orwell certainly appreciated the differences between the various groups, since he was always careful to differentiate between them. For instance, when he referred to his own class as "lower upper middle class."

Because this social section seems to have lacked the homogeneity of the upper class or even that of the lower class, it will be referred to in the plural in this study.

Although the middle classes encompassed so many different social groupings, it is nevertheless possible to divide the groups into two major categories, which will be termed in this study 'upper middle' and 'lower middle.' The upper middle will be understood to include the professions, Indian and other imperial civil servants, the army, the clergy, the intellectuals, and those downwardly-mobile individuals whose families had been better off in the past, but who still retained the general attitudes of people more wealthy than themselves. It does not include the category which Orwell on occasion referred to as 'rich bourgeois', since this term obviously refers to the very rich 'captains of industry' class who, by virtue of their power, can be allocated to the upper class. The lower middle class will be understood to include the suburban clerical class, and the shopkeeper and tradesman class that can most easily be found in a provincial town.

Orwell's Experience of the Middle Classes

Orwell's experience of the middle classes was considerable, although, understandably, his experience did not cover every possible group; the notable exception being the affluent professionals in medicine or law about whom Orwell has almost nothing to say. His experience and comments are largely concerned with the declining middle classes - those that would soon find themselves replaced by the technocrats, engineers and businessmen of the 'new middle class.' Despite this limitation -

the neglect of the one prosperous section of the middle classes - Orwell's observations of the middle classes are full and, once again, entirely based on what he had seen for himself.

The class of which Orwell had most experience was that of the Indian civil servants, also referred to by him as the impoverished officer class. Being born in India into a family of Indian civil servants, Orwell knew the class quite intimately, and he expanded on his experience by himself spending five years in the Burma police. His knowledge of the clergy can be specifically traced to his friendship with a clergyman while he was teaching in the London suburbs, while his contact with intellectuals was inevitable, given his choice of career. Orwell was also quite familiar with the lower middle class. His often restricted income, and his parents' fairly straightened circumstances when he was a child, meant that his contact with the provincial shopkeeper class continued throughout his life. At one time Orwell and his wife ran a village store of their own on Hertfordshire, in order to supplement their income. Orwell's contact with the suburban lower middle class, meanwhile, dates from his experience of teaching in Hayes.

Orwell's perception of the middle classes was therefore the perception of a man who at one and the same time vaguely identified himself with them, while fully appreciating the failings of these groups. He could never be credited with being completely objective on this subject, but he was nevertheless able to utilize his personal experiences to make an honest and illuminating comment on the middle classes of his time, and the education they gave their children.

Middle Class Home Culture

Orwell's knowledge of the various sections of the middle class was sufficient to provide a certain insight into the home life which was so formative in the education of the children of these groups. From Orwell's writings it appears that there was quite a considerable difference between upper middle class home culture and that of the lower middle class, and for this reason they must be treated separately.

The upper middle class had a special notion of family which implied a defensive solidarity against a world that was largely getting the better of them. A great deal of pressure was put on the individual to preserve and enhance the 'good name' of the family. An illustration of such an environment can be found in Orwell's description of the Comstock family in Keep the Aspidistra Flying. Grandpa Comstock had made a great deal of money out of industrial enterprises in Victorian times, and had been vigorous enough to produce eleven children. Symptomatic of the subsequent decline of the family (as far as Orwell was concerned)[1] was the fact that these eleven children produced only two offspring between them. After the death of Grandpa, the family began to slowly fritter away its wealth, since none of the children had the 'gift' of being able to make money. Yet the family preserved a shabby-genteel appearance, even though this appearance concealed a great deal of misery.

The Comstocks had lost their vitality and their wealth, but the more their conditions worsened, the more fiercely they retained their claim to 'respectability.' This 'respectability' was expressed in the tremendous sacrifices made by the family in order to send the young Gordon to an "imitation public school." In order to pay the fees, his widowed mother had to give music lessons that ruined her health, and his sister, deprived of an education herself, had to work in a teashop. So involved was the family in Gordon's career, for which they had made so many sacrifices, that the young man's refusal to take up a 'good job' with an advertising concern was seen as a disaster. Gordon was bombarded with despairing letters from his aunts and uncles, and his sister Julia turned grey with anxiety.

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[1] Orwell commonly associated fertility with vitality. From his letters one learns that it was a matter of sadness for him that he was unable to produce a child of his own. In common with many of his contemporaries, he was hostile to birth control, and felt that England's future was being threatened by the declining birth-rate.

Keep the Aspidistra Flying is strictly speaking a work of fiction, but, like all Orwell's fiction, it has a substantial element of autobiography in it. Orwell's family were also impoverished upper middle class, having a great faith in symbols of respectability, such as public school education. Orwell himself had to bear the pained disapproval of his family when he resigned his commission with the Imperial police, and announced his desire to become, of all things, a writer. Like Gordon, Orwell was 'betraying' his family to some extent, by failing to live up to their expectations after they had invested so much in his education. Orwell realised that the enormous investment in education by a relatively poor family placed unnecessary constraints on the child in later life:

> What a fearful thing it is, this incubus of 'education'! It means that in order to send his son to the right kind of school (that is a public school or an imitation one) a middle class man is obliged to live for years on end in a style that would be scorned by a jobbing plumber.[1]

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[1] Orwell, Keep the Aspidistra Flying (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 46.

Having witnessed the sacrifices made by his family, the child would feel that he was under great pressure to justify the investment.

Side-by-side with this upper-middle class insistence on a 'good education' for the children (especially the boys), was a concern that the children should not associate with children of a lower class. Orwell himself was restricted in such a way:

> it was not long before I was forbidden to play with the plumber's children; they were 'common' and I was told to keep away from them. This was snobbish, if you like, but it was also necessary, for middle class people cannot afford to let their children grow up with vulgar accents.[1]

Upper middle class child-rearing can therefore be summed up as a concern with respectability, which affects the child insofar as he is expected to do his best to preserve the family status, and justify the great sacrifices that the family was prepared to make for his education.

The home culture of the lower middle classes differed markedly from that of the upper middle class. The difference was most noticeable in the suburban middle class, which as far as Orwell was concerned, was extremely narrow-minded and ignorant. Orwell was not of course intimately acquainted with the home culture of this class, but he was well acquainted with the parents of the children he taught at Hayes. At home the children were raised on the 'spare the rod and spoil the child' basis, particularly if the family was of the non-conformist, petty-shopkeeper mould. The parents were largely insensitive to the needs of the children, and were over-concerned with the enforcing of 'morality.' Among other things, this involved a total avoidance of the teaching of the 'Facts of Life,' at least until the child was in its twenties. Orwell illustrates this kind of attitude in his novel A Clergyman's Daughter.

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[1] Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier, p. 110.

Not all suburban lower middle class families conformed to this image. In Coming Up For Air (1939) Orwell's description of the family of George Bowling, an insurance agent, shows that there were exceptions to this narrow-minded, non-conformist pattern. Bowling had a genuine affection for his children (particularly when they were asleep), although happy family life was made impossible on account of Bowling's nagging wife. The children were brought up in an estate of terraced 'villas' which were being purchased by the occupiers by means of infinite mortgages. When the estate was first built, it had looked out onto fields where the children were able to play, which it was understood would be allowed to remain. Inevitably, however, these fields soon gave way to yet more suburban villas.

The children of the provincial shopkeeper class were not constrained by parental values and physical environment in the way their counterparts in the suburbs were constrained. Admittedly, the evidence one must draw on in this case concerns a family setting which existed before the First World War (that is, George Bowling's family as a child), but it is reasonable to assume that such families could still be found in the inter-war period, for not all of the provincial shopkeeper class would have been forced out of business, in the way Bowling's parents were, by the new department stores.

The family of Bowling's childhood was altogether more warm and agreeable than surburban lower-middle class families as Orwell depicts them. 'Mother' in Coming Up For Air was a large, homely woman. She was noticeably lacking in general knowledge (for example she had no idea where Ireland was), but this was of no real importance, since she possessed that admirable quality, 'common decency,' which Orwell admired so much. 'Mother' was almost a working class figure as Orwell portrays her. She was the pivot of the family, with a totally un-puritanical attitude to life. Most of her time was spent in the kitchen, cooking enormous meals: "boiled beef and dumplings, roast beef and Yorkshire, boiled mutton and capers, pigs head, apple pie, spotted dog, and jam roly-poly -- with grace before and after."[1]

'Father' was a less prepossessing figure, who kept a seed shop, and was unable to enforce discipline with his children:

> The old ideas about bringing up children still held good, though they were going out fast. In theory children were still thrashed and put to bed on bread and water, and certainly you were liable to be sent away from the table if you made too much noise eating, or choked, or refused something that was 'good for you,' or answered back. In practice there was not too much discipline in our family, and of the two Mother was the firmer.[2]

It would be a mistake to assume that this class, as presented by Orwell, was so different from other sections of the middle class that it did not concern itself with status symbols. These people also tended to place a value on schooling, as much for its status value as its usefulness. George Bowling and his brother were sent first to the local dame school, and afterwards to the local Grammar School where, to quote Bowling, "you stayed until you were sixteen just to show that you weren't a prole."[3]

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[1] Orwell, Coming Up For Air (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 50.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 67.

From the descriptions Orwell gives of both upper and lower middle class life, there appears to have been a great deal of variety in the quality of home life; for some children it was mean, cold and restrictive, while for others it was warm and reassuring. The one common factor shared by all types of family was a concern for respectability, for which certain sacrifices had to be made.

Middle Class Schooling

The most important way of asserting respectability was through the schooling of the children. The schools chosen by this class were outside the free state system, so consequently they satisfied the parents' desire for status since they imitated, as far as was possible (or desired) the upper class school organisation and curriculum. At the same time they allowed the parents a great deal of control over school policy, and what actually was taught.

Although schooling was to such a large extent under the control of the parents, the schools nevertheless had some independent characteristics which need to be considered separately. Perhaps it will then be possible to assert that certain qualities of the middle classes were traceable directly to the schools which they patronised.

The schools to which the upper middle class children were sent differed from those attended by lower middle class children in the level of fees charged. For example, the 'cheap public school' attended by Gordon Comstock cost £120 a year, while Mrs. Creevy's private school in *A Clergyman's Daughter* cost under £15 a year. The typical upper middle class school was a preparatory or public school of the calibre of St. Cyprians, or worse. If the parents were willing to make large sacrifices, a school such as St. Cyprians would be chosen, which might perhaps open the possibility for attendance at a good public school later on - if the child was able to win a scholarship which would help to reduce the enormous burden of the fees. An upper-middle class child therefore had the chance of upward mobility if he was able and willing to make full use of his opportunities. Orwell himself succeeded in this respect, by winning a scholarship to Eton. But he did not follow up this success by qualifying for Oxford or Cambridge. The majority of the impoverished upper middle class did not even meet with this measure of success. Like Gordon Comstock, they would probably have gone to a cheap public school, and from thence moved on to a career of greater or lesser obscurity.

Orwell's description of the school attended by Gordon is not particularly illuminating since it centres primarily on Orwell's familiar complaint that everyone else in the school was so much richer. In revenge against his own victimisation, like Orwell himself, Gordon cultivated an unconventional manner, which involved reading books denounced from the pulpit, and defending "subversive ideas" which consisted largely of hatred of the "money god." Altogether, the description of Gordon's school years reads very much like Orwell's own school memories, although Eton was obviously a far more expensive, and therefore a very different, institution.

The lower middle class, "too poor to afford the fees of a decent school and too proud to send their children to a council school"[1] usually decided upon one of the numerous small and ill-equipped 'private academies' which could be found almost everywhere in the suburbs. On this subject Orwell speaks with authority, since he taught in two such schools in Hayes, Middlesex. The first of these, "The Hawthornes," was closed down after a widely-publicised scandal, while the second, "Frays College" is still in existence.[1] Orwell therefore speaks from experience when he states:

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[1] Orwell, A Clergyman's Daughter, p. 212.

> There are, by the way, vast numbers of private schools in England. Second-rate, third-rate and fourth-rate (Ringwood House was an example of a fourth-rate school), they exist by the dozen and the score in every London suburb and every provincial town. At any given moment there are somewhere in the neighbourhood of ten thousand of them, of which less than a thousand are subject to Government inspection. And though some of them are better than others, and a certain number, probably, are better than the council schools with which they compete, there is the same fundamental evil in all of them; that is, they have ultimately no purpose except to make money. Often, except that there is nothing illegal about them, they are started in exactly the same spirit as one would start a brothel or a bucket shop.[2]

Orwell was appalled by the way totally unprincipled and unqualified people could set up private schools. Mrs. Creevy, who ran Ringwood House, is described as nevor having read and book "and was proud of it."[3] Yet she was very shrewd when it came to making money; the school, as far as she was concerned, had only one purpose as she herself explained: "it's the fees I'm after, not developing the children's minds."[4]

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[1] The present headmaster, Mr. Henry Stapley, was a junior master at the time and remembers Orwell as "a very quiet person, he used to spend much of his time typing in his room. In those days teachers were glad to have jobs and none of the staff ever dared to smoke until Blair came. But he took no notice and always smoked his dark shag" (Hillingdon Mirror, Dec. 26, 1967, p. 10).

[2] Orwell, A Clergyman's Daughter, p. 212.

[3] Ibid., p. 191.

[4] Ibid., p. 208.

The children were kept clearly aware of this fact, for Mrs. Creevy had divided the girls into three groups which the new teacher, in this case Dorothy, was obliged to learn by heart. Mrs. Creevy explained the lists as follows:

> Well the parents of that lot are what I call the good payers. You know what I mean by that? They're the ones who pay cash on the nail and no jibbing at an extra half-guinea or so now and then. You're not to smack any of that lot, not on any account. This lot over here are the medium payers. Their parents do pay up sooner or later, but you don't get the money out of them without you worry them for it night and day. You can smack that lot if they get saucy, but don't go and leave a mark their parents can see. If you'll take my advice, the best thing with children is to twist their ears. . . These three over here are the bad payers. Their fathers are two terms behind already, and I'm thinking of a solicitor's letter. I don't care what you do with that lot, well, short of a police court-case, naturally.[1]

At dinner time, the status of the three kinds of pupil was made clear in the servings of food they were given. The good payers got a good serving, the medium payers got a bad serving, while the bad payers got nothing at all.

Another way Mrs. Creevy found to save money was by paying the teacher (in this case Dorothy) as little as possible. Mrs. Creevy was certainly delighted when Dorothy bought textbooks for the girls out of her own money, but the delight was not sufficient to justify her paying Dorothy's wages through the summer holidays. It was Mrs. Creevy's custom to dismiss her teachers at the end of the school year rather than 'pay them for doing nothing.'

Altogether, Mrs. Creevy was totally obsessed with money. But hers was a very special kind of avarice:

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

> It meant more to her to save sixpence than to earn a pound. So long as she could think of a way of docking Dorothy's dinner of another potato, or getting her exercise books a half-penny a dozen cheaper, or shoving an unauthorized half-guinea on one of the good payer bills, she was happy, after her fashion.[1]

Only one sentiment was more important to Mrs. Creevy than making money, and this was her hatred of Mr. Boulger, who ran the private school for boys next door. There was no real reason for this feud, but that did not prevent Mrs. Creevy from reaching the heights of 'spiritual orgasm' by throwing wet ashes over Mr. Boulger's tulip bed. She was even prepared to go to the lengths of actually purchasing a whole tin of weed-killer to finish off Mr. Boulger's plum tree, whose roots had crept under the dividing wall.

Although the raison d'etre of private schools such as Ringwood House was to make money, it was very important that a pretense of 'status' was kept up, for the parents' sake. It was essential, on the one hand, that the school prospectus gave the impression of 'classiness,' while on the other hand it was important to keep in mind the exigencies of 'practical' education. Mrs. Creevy explained how this was to be managed:

> None of our parents'd want their children to waste time over Latin. But they like to see it on the prospectus. It looks classy. Of course there's a whole lot of subjects that we can't actually teach, but we have to advertise them all the same. Book-keeping and typing and shorthand, for instance; besides music and dancing. It all looks well on the prospectus.[2]

The snobbishness of the parents was thus catered for, while at the same time their demand for "practical education" was met.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 210.

As understood by the parents, "practical education" consisted almost exclusively of hand-writing and money-sums. Notebooks were carefully filled with 'copies' - handwriting copied from the blackboard - in the neat, copper-plate style that impressed the parents. Money sums also satisfied them, since this was a talent they understood and appreciated. Any attempt at teaching any other kind of mathematics bewildered them, and aroused their anger. This hostility is apparent from a letter Dorothy received, very probably based on one Orwell himself received when teaching:

> Dear Miss - Would you please give Mabel a bit more arithmetic? I feel that what you give her is not practacle enough. All of these maps and that. She wants practacle work, not all this fancy stuff. So more arithmetic please. And remain,
>
> Yours Faithfully
> Geo. Briggs
>
> P.S. Mabel says your talking of starting her on something call decimals. I don't want her taught decimals. I want her taught arithmetic.[1]

Handwriting and money-sums were the most important subjects in the 'practical' education of schools such as Ringwood House. Nevertheless, a few other 'disciplines' made an appearance in the form of geography and history; but they consisted entirely of long lists of capitals and dates that had to be learned off by heart. Dorothy, in her initial enthusiasm for teaching, decided to make certain innovations in order to brighten classroom life and remedy the children's abysmal ignorance. As a substitute for the lists of capitals she succeeded in getting the girls to reproduce a contour map of Europe in plasticene, with the help of an atlas. She also managed to give them a better sense of history by making a chart which she hung along the walls and divided off into centuries, illustrating it in the appropriate places with drawings of ancient Britons, cavaliers and roundheads. Small enough innovations, but Mrs. Creevy was immediately suspicious, particularly when Dorothy took books from the library to teach the girls with. Typically, Mrs. Creevy's immediate concern was with the parents' view of this new kind of history. As she said:

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[1] Ibid., p. 201.

> I opened one of those books the other day, and the first thing I saw was a piece where it said the English had been beaten in some battle or other. That's a nice thing to go teaching children! The parents won't stand for that kind of thing, I can tell you![1]

Far more popular with Mrs. Creevy was a little book called The Hundred Page History of Britain, printed in 1888. Orwell quotes an extract from the book, which presented an altogether more cheerful, if limited, perspective on English history,

> After the French Revolution was over, the self-styled Emperor Napoleon Buonaparte attempted to set up his sway, but though he won a few victories against continental troops, he soon found in the thin red line he had more than met his match. Conclusions were tried at the field of Waterloo, where 50,000 Britons put to flight 70,000 Frenchmen, for the Prussians, our allies, arrived too late for the battle. With a ringing British cheer our men charged down the slope and the enemy fled. We now come to the great Reform Bill of 1832, the first of those beneficent reforms which have made British liberty what it is and marked us off from the less fortunate nations. . . .[2]

It seems likely that this was an actual text that Orwell had come across while teaching at Hayes.

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[1] Ibid., p. 210.

[2] Ibid., p. 187.

Not only did Dorothy try to avoid this kind of teaching, she also rearranged the classroom, getting the girls to work in groups. She also substituted the parrot-like teaching of French ("passez-moi le beurre" "le fils du jardinier a perdu son chapeau") with grammatical instruction. The atmosphere of the classroom improved tremendously, and the children acquired a new enthusiasm for their work.

Orwell himself, when teaching at "The Hawthornes," seems to have tried much the same kind of experiment. In his letters to friends at Southwold he asked for eggs of puss moths to show to the boys, since he could not find any in Hayes. He had a life-long interest in fishing, so it is not surprising that he chose to keep an aquarium in the classroom, full of tadpoles, newts and caddisflies.[1] Just before Christmas 1932 Orwell actually put on a school play which he had written, directed and made the costumes for himself. Significantly, from that time until he finished teaching he made no mention in his letters of having made any further attempts at enlivening the curriculum, making only negative comments about his teaching life.

Perhaps Orwell's sudden loss of interest is explained by an incident something like the one described in A Clergyman's Daughter, which finally put and end to Dorothy's rather naive enthusiasm. The trouble came when Dorothy started reading Macbeth with the girls. From the beginning, the parents were sceptical. Dorothy received one letter which was worded as follows:

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[1] Orwell, Letter to Eleanor Jaques, 14 June 1932, in Collected Essays, I, 106.

> (I) have heard that this Mr. Shakespeare was a writer of stage-plays and is Miss Millborough quite certain that he wasn't a very immoral writer? For (my) own part I have never so much as been to the pictures in my life, let alone to a stage play, and I feel that even in reading a stage-play there was grave danger.[1]

This typically non-conformist (in Orwell's use of that term) and puritanical parent was at first mollified by the information that Mr. Shakespeare was in fact dead, but the doubt still remained, and a full-scale scandal blew up when the word 'womb' had to be explained to the girls. A deputation of irate parents came to the school to watch Mrs. Creevy publicly reprimand Dorothy for her 'immoral' conduct. At this point Dorothy capitulated, and until she left the school she taught the girls in the way they had always been taught. She finally won the grudging acceptance of Mrs. Creevy and the parents, but at the cost of the hatred of the girls.

As a novel, A Clergyman's Daughter lacks literary merit. Orwell realised this fact himself, and even went around buying up copies soon after it had been published. The book can be criticised for being disjointed, but it is also weakened by the didactic passages which Orwell incorporates at various places in the book, which do little to advance the development of the novel. However, those factors which detract from the work as a novel - and particularly the thinly-disguised autobiographical passages - are precisely those that are of interest to the educationalist. It is obvious that the section on Ringwood House was in fact Orwell's attempt at 'working through' his feelings of frustration acquired while teaching. One might ask, therefore, whether or not there was any substantial exaggeration in Orwell's description of cheap private schools. A letter from Orwell to his publishers, written just before the book was published, provides an answer to this question:

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[1] Orwell, A Clergyman's Daughter, p. 201.

> I am willing to admit that the part about the school, which seems to have aroused people's incredulity, is overdrawn, but not nearly so much as people think. In fact I was rather amused to see that they say "all that was done away with 30 or 40 years ago." As to this part, it is possible that if Mr. Gollancz agrees, a little 'toning down' may meet the bill.[1]

The book as it was published, therefore, had already been 'toned down,' and therefore can be said to be a sincere and most probably genuine account of the type of schools attended by the lower middle classes of the suburbs.

In small provincial towns, the lower middle class was almost as conscious of status as their suburban counterparts. Orwell states that there existed a social distinction between the "shopkeepers' sons and the sons of labourers and farmhands."[2] Social class differences were reinforced by the different schooling given to the children, the shopkeepers sending their children to the local dame school and later to the grammar school, while the working class sent their children to free state schools. In Coming Up For Air, Bowling describes the local dame school kept by Mrs. Howlett:

> Most of the shopkeepers' children were sent there, to save them from the shame and come-down of going to the board school, though everyone knew that Mrs. Howlett was an old imposter, and worse than useless as a teacher. She was over seventy, she was very deaf, she could hardly see through

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[1] Orwell, Letter to Leonard Moore, 14th Nov. 1934, in Collected Essays, I, 167.

[2] Orwell, Coming Up For Air, p. 56.

> her spectacles, and all she owned in the way of equipment was a cane, a blackboard, a few dog-eared grammar books, and a couple of dozen smelly slates. She could just manage the girls, but the boys simply laughed at her and played truant as often as they felt like it.[1]

On leaving the dame school, the shopkeeper's child in a town like Lower Binfield usually went to the local grammar school. Bowling points out the social differencs between the shopkeeper class and the 'proles,' and between the grammar schools and public schools:

> You went to the Grammar School and you stayed there until you were sixteen, just to show you weren't a prole, but school was chiefly a place that you wanted to get away from. You'd no sense of loyalty, no goofy feeling about the old grey stones (and they were old right enough, the school had been founded by Cardinal Wolsey), and there was no Old Boy's tie and not even a school song. You had your half-holidays to yourself, because games weren't compulsory and as often as not you cut them. We played football in braces, and though it was considered proper to play cricket in a belt, you wore your ordinary shirt and trousers.[2]

Orwell seems to approve of this less formalised kind of education, since it allowed a certain freedom for individual growth, the quality for which Orwell praised Eton.

Orwell's description of grammar school life in Coming Up For Air is not particularly extensive, probably because he felt he was not qualified to discuss the subject. Nevertheless, there is no reason for suggesting that Orwell saw grammar schools as essentially different from the private schools. Like private schools, they emulated public school customs as much as possible, and if they were not too rigorous in their imitating, then they approached the tolerable. They offered a better quality education than such places as Ringwood House, but at the same time fitted into the continuum that stretched from public schools at the top down to the meanest fourth-rate school.

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[1] Ibid., p. 55.

[2] Ibid., p. 67.

From this analysis of middle class schooling, it appears that the main features which dominated the schools were hypocrisy and snobbishness. In schools of high status among the middle classes, such as St. Cyprians, there was a conflict between upper class and middle class ideology in that the upper class disdain for money-making was combined with the working philosophy that wealth was really the thing that mattered. At the other extreme, Ringwood House made a pretense at providing an upper class-type curriculum in its prospectus, while the parents' desires were met with what was in fact 'practical' education. This hypocrisy was even visible in Lower Binfield, where the strictly limited teaching abilities of Mrs. Howlett were well-known, although no middle class parent would have subjected his child to the better education offered in the board school. The parents in middle class families, it appears, were determined to pay fees, whatever the consequences, the only restriction being the amount they could reasonably afford. Only by paying fees could the middle classes express their social status.

The Middle Classes as a Product of Education

It is not surprising that the adults who emerged from the educational process should have manifested the same kind of hypocrisy as was evident in the schools and homes where they grew up. All the middle class groups discussed by Orwell exhibited hypocrisy.

Among the upper middle class groups, most individuals combined their proclaimed high station with a well-concealed poverty. One such impoverished group was the clergy, who had suffered from the declining support of the Church of England. Orwell describes the Rector in A Clergyman's Daughter in these terms. The Rector had obviously no devotion to his vocation, and spent his life being disagreeable to everyone (especially his daughter), running up debts, and alienating his parishioners with his high-handed attitude. His particular hypocrisy consisted of an absolute refusal to recognise his financial situation, for although he owed a great deal to local shopkeepers, he persisted in wasting away his tiny fortune in an upper class manner, investing in hopeless enterprises whose failure made him even more bad-tempered. If he had not played at being what he decidely was not - that is, upper class - he might have succeeded in winning the affection of his parish, and holding on to his fortune.

A similarly impoverished group which Orwell knew a little better was the civil servant and officer class, returned from India or other parts of the Empire. These people, and Orwell's family were no exception, had little or no fortunes, being required to live on their pensions. They rarely owned their own homes, and often had great difficulty in settling down in one place on their return to Britain. Orwell's parents, and indeed Orwell himself, spent their lives moving from place to place, living in rented accommodation, and never owning a car.

From all accounts, Orwell was fond of his family, but this did not prevent him from giving an unflattering picture of a similar family in Coming Up For Air:

> Do you know these Anglo-Indian families? It's almost impossible, when you get inside these people's houses, to remember that out in the street it's England in the twentieth century. As you set foot inside the front door you're in India of the eighties. You know the kind of atmosphere. The carved teak furniture, the brass trays, the dusty tiger-skulls on the walls, the Trichonopoly cigars, the red-hot pickles, the yellow photographs of chaps in sun-helmets, the Hindustani words you're expected to know the meaning of, the everlasting anecdotes about tiger-shoots and what Smith said to Jones in Poona in '87. It's a sort of little world they've created, like a kind of cyst.[1]

It is not surprising that such families should have preferred to live in the past rather than the present. Life in India represented affluence, servants, and evenings at the Club. Even those of modest means could play at being aristocrats. In his best-written novel, Burmese Days, Orwell makes a convincing study of colonial life. None of the English at Kyauktada had an upper class background, and yet they all behaved as if they had, treating the Burmese with scarcely concealed disdain. The women were, if anything, more racist than the men, shamelessly pursuing the Honorable Verral, the only genuine aristocrat to make his appearance in that outpost of Empire. Orwell seems to have modeled the women on his own grandmother, who lived in Burma for forty years without learning a word of the language.

The fundamental hypocrisy of this class was fully revealed on returning to England. Hilda Bowling's family, lately returned from India, lived its rather pathetic, nostalgic existence without ever acknowledging its real financial status. They were more than happy to see their daughter married off to an insurance salesman, since they had a pious respect for everything that went by the name of 'business,' of which they were, needless to say, quite ignorant:

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[1] Orwell, Coming Up For Air, p. 134.

> To people of that kind, 'business,' whether it's marine insurance or selling peanuts, is just a dark mystery. All they know is that it's something rather vulgar out of which you can make money.[1]

Money, of course, was the commodity such families lacked. To keep up the appearance of affluence, countless small sacrifices had to be made in everyday life. After a certain length of time, such mannerisms became second nature to these people. Bowling, for example, was shocked by the sudden change that came over his wife once she married, from that point on she spent her life in continual agonies over the price of food, taking her only recreation in attending unintelligible lectures, which she considered worthwhile because they were free.

More pathetic was the pretense practised by a similar class of people, those who had had wealth in the recent past and had lost all except their respect for economic status. Gordon Comstock's Aunt Angela, for example, lived in her own home, but was dependent for her survival on the stale buns her niece Julia would occasionally bring from the teashop where she worked. Both the women knew the real state of affairs, but it was an unspoken rule that neither should admit to the truth, and Julia would always dismiss the gift as something which otherwise would have been thrown away.

The civil-servant, officer class (occasionally referred to by Orwell as the Blimps) had a tendency to turn up in the same families as that other upper middle class group, the intellectuals. According to Orwell:

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[1] Ibid., p. 135.

> These two seemingly hostile types, symbolic opposites - the half-pay colonel with the bull neck and diminutive brain, like a dinosaur, the highbrow with his domed forehead and stalk-like neck - are mentally linked together and constantly interact on one another; in any case they are born to a considerable extent into the same families.[1]

Orwell obviously was not particularly endeared to either type. His dislike of the intellectual is interesting, because although he was undeniably an intellectual himself, he often exhibited anti-intellectual tendencies, respecting the man of action over and above the man of intellect. Orwell's particular argument with the majority of intellectuals concerns their espousal of fashionable left-wing opinions:

> It should be noted that there is now no intelligentsia that is not in some sense 'left.' Perhaps the last right-wing intellectual was T. E. Lawrence. Since about 1930 everyone describable as 'intellectual' has lived in a state of chronic discontent with the existing order. Necessarily so, because society as it is constituted has no room for him. In an Empire that was simply stagnant, neither being developed nor falling to pieces, and in an England ruled by people whose chief asset was their stupidity, to be 'clever' was to be suspect. If you had had the kind of brain that could understand the poems of T. S. Eliot or the theories of Karl Marx, the higher-ups would see to it that you were kept out of an important job. The intellectual could find a function for themselves only in the literary reviews and the left-wing political parties.[2]

This alienation of the intellectuals did not 'improve' them, and Orwell, borrowing his ideas on this subject from Gissing,[3] felt that a great deal of talent, which could have been usefully employed had been wasted and gone sour. The kind of socialism which the intellectuals were forced into did not require a genuine commitment; it was essentially a hypocritical, a cover-up for frustration. This hypocrisy could at times be very blatant, as for example in the case of Hermione, in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, whose commitment to socialism reached its high point in her comment:

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[1] Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn," in Collected Essays, II, 93.

[2] Ibid., p. 94.

[3] Orwell had read Gissing in depth, and Keep the Aspidistra Flying is closely modelled on Gissing's New Grub Street. Gissing could be said

> Of course I know you're a socialist. So am I. I mean, we're all Socialists nowadays. But I don't see why you have to give all your money away and make friends with the lower classes. You can be a Socialist *and* have a good time, that's what I say.[1]

Ravelston, Hermione's boyfriend, was not so overtly hypocritical. Orwell sympathised with him because he was at least aware of his dilemma, and was disturbed by it. He realised that it was rather strange for him to be 'slumming it' on £800 a year, while the average working man was supporting a family on £200, and therefore he went out of his way to help unfortunates like Gordon Comstock. Ravelston was, however, an exception, for on the whole the intellectuals, as far as Orwell was concerned, persistently failed to face the paradox, or even admit to a vague feeling of guilt. The average bourgeois intellectual, Orwell says, took his cookery from Paris and his opinions from Moscow, mouthing ideologies he did not really feel in his heart:

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to be in the same anomolous class position as Orwell, living most of his life in dismal conditions, describing the dreary lives of writers who refused to 'sell out' to hack journalism. A review of his work by Orwell can be found in *Collected Essays*, IV, 485-493.

[1] Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, p. 106.

> He would be ready to die on the barricades, in theory anyway, but you notice that he still leaves his bottom waistcoat button undone. He idealises the proletariat, but it is remarkable how little his habits resemble theirs. Perhaps once, out of sheer bravado, he has smoked a cigar with the band on, but it would be almost physically impossible for him to put a bit of cheese into his mouth on the point of a knife, or sit indoors with his cap on, or even drink his tea out of the saucer.[1]

Some of the bitterness of this indictment comes from the fact that Orwell himself had an instinctive horror of dirt, and, even more, of unpleasant smells. His exploits among the lower classes were to some extent an exercise in overcoming these repulsions. When others were not prepared to make a similar effort, Orwell tended to become impatient, and was unwilling to remain silent over their hypocrisy. The other motivation behind his critique of the intellectuals was a political one; Orwell felt that the cause of a truly English Socialism was being undermined by the insincere kind of socialism which was in vogue in the thirties. Above all, the intellectual class (into which bag he was anxious to place a number of other disparate eccentrics) was thoroughly unpatriotic in its socialism, choosing to follow the Moscow line, which Orwell felt sure would discredit the socialist cause. As he put it,

> We have reached the stage when the very word 'Socialism' calls up, on the one hand, a picture of aeroplanes, tractors, and huge glittering factories of glass and concrete; and on the other, a picture of vegetarians with wilting beards, of Bolshevic commissars (half gangster half gramophone), of earnest ladies in sandals, shock-headed Marxists chewing polysyllables, escaped Quakers, birth-control fanatics, and Labour Party backstairs-crawlers. Socialism, at least on this island, does not smell any longer of revolution and overthrow of tyrants; it smells of crankishness, machine worship, and the stupid cult of Russia.[2]

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[1] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 119.

[2] Ibid., p. 190.

From Orwell's evidence it appears that the upper middle class were not alone in their hypocrisy; the lower middle class were guilty also, in their own way. Not only were they hypocritical, but a good many of them succeeded in being extremely dull as well. The most dismal of all the lower middle class groups was the suburban clerical-shopkeeper class, described in its ideal form by Gordon Comstock:

> . . . the typical little bowler-hatted sneak - Strube's little man - the little docile cit who slips home by the six-fifteen to a supper of cottage pie and stewed tinned pears, half an hour's listening-in to the B.B.C. Symphony concert, and then perhaps a spot of licit sexual intercourse if his wife feels 'in the mood.'[1]

Orwell had very little patience for this class, which he associated exclusively with non-conformism and aspidistras. Chinz curtains and aspidistras symbolised for him, a so-called 'respectable' way of life, which in reality was mean and dreary.

There was only one section of the lower middle class for which Orwell had any sympathy, and this was the old shopkeeper class of the small provincial towns, personified in the form of Bowling's parents. Admittedly, this couple had certain ideas about respectability and were fussy about the schools their children attended. But this did not stop them from retaining a genuine warmth, which can only elsewhere be found in Orwell's writings when he deals with the working class. Bowling describes a typical Sunday afternoon scene in the following words:

> Mother on one side of the fireplace, starting off to read the latest murder, but gradually falling asleep with her mouth open, and Father on the other, in slippers and spectacles, working his way slowly through yards of smudgy print. And

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[1] Orwell, Keep the Aspidistra Flying, p. 53.

> the soft feeling of summer all around you, the geranium in the window, a starling cooing somewhere, and myself under the table with the B.O.P., making believe that the table is a tent.[1]

There is an extraordinary resemblance between this passage and that which describes a similar scene in a working class home, which can be found in The Road to Wigan Pier:

> On winter evenings, after tea, when the fire glows in the open range and dances mirrored in the steel fender, when Father in shirt sleeves, sits in a rocking chair on one side of the fire reading the racing finals, and Mother sits on the other with her sewing, and the children are happy with a pennorth of mint humbugs, and the dog roasts himself on the rag mat - it is a good place to be in, provided that you can be not only in it but sufficiently of it to be taken for granted.[2]

Orwell is talking here, very romantically, of a world from which he felt excluded, but a world which he deeply respected and, in a way, yearned after. The lower middle class family of George Bowling was much the same, and its virtues were those which had been carried over from the working class, where the family had its origins. Unfortunately, there was not much of a future for small shopkeepers like the Bowlings, who were too scrupulous and too unimaginative in their business dealings. They were soon to be taken over, or squeezed out by the new, streamlined department stores. When this eventually came about, such people were faced with the choice either of dropping back into the working class whose culture they shared, or adapting in the way George Bowling adapted to the dominant middle class life-style.

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[1] Orwell, Coming Up For Air, p. 46.

[2] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 104.

Evaluation

The middle classes which Orwell described were not a particularly vital social group. The old middle classes were doomed, and one important reason for the threat to their existence was their hypocrisy. Hypocrisy, and an unnecessary concern for appearances, had prevented them from examining their situation rationally. To a large extent the schools they patronised were responsible for this condition. In the case of the upper middle class schools, an elaborate imitation of the good public schools was the rule, even though the pupils could not be guaranteed upper-class careers. The boys must have been aware that the education they were receiving would not help them to earn a living in later life, and yet they were forced to conform with the pretense. The lower middle class private schools also made an attempt at imitating upper class school curriculum, at least in theory. Even the grammar schools were not free of this tendency.

A remarkable consistency can be found, also, between the home cultures and the schools of the various groups of the middle class. The declining yet pretentious upper middle class patronised pretentious schools; while children of narrow-minded and ignorant families attended schools which were much the same. The regime in the grammar school was less oppressive, but then so was that of the families of the pupils who attended these schools. If Orwell was justified in giving his readers this impression, then the qualitative variation between different categories of the middle classes is not difficult to explain. And if the middle classes - at least those groups which Orwell describes - were in decline, it is to the child-rearing habits and the schooling patterns of these classes that one must look for an explanation.

CHAPTER V

THE WORKING CLASS

The Nature of the Class

The working class, as it will be defined in this chapter, comprises that vast section of the population who occupy the skilled and unskilled occupational sectors of society. In his discussion of Britain in the thirties, Mowat has arbitrarily classified as working class that section of the wage-earning population who were bringing home less than £4 a week. Using this rough guideline, more than three-quarters of the population could be defined as working class.[1] Also included in this class was the outcaste group of tramps and vagrants, who, because of their poverty, can be considered to be part of the working class. Orwell seems to identify the two groups, for in his book The Road to Wigan Pier he discusses the working class from the perspective of his own experience of the outcaste group, and refers to this section of the population as "one sub-caste of the working class."[2] For these reasons the two groups will be dealt with together, although it will be necessary occasionally to contrast them.

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[1] Charles Mowat, Britain Between the Wars (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), Ch. 9.

[2] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 133.

The working class was not equally distributed throughout the country; in the south and east it existed in close physical proximity with the middle and upper classes (Orwell once claimed that there was hardly anywhere in the south where one could throw a stone without hitting the niece of a bishop); while in the industrial midlands and north the population was almost exclusively working class. In areas of dense population in the industrial areas the middle classes were almost non-existent.

This unequal geographical distribution necessarily contributed to cultural differences between the northern and the southern working classes. Orwell can be credited with having noticed that there were such differences; the northern occupational category of working class being more culturally distinct than its southern counterpart:

> In the south of England, at any rate, it is unquestionable that most working class people want to resemble the upper classes in manners and habits. The traditional attitude of looking down on the upper classes as effeminate and 'la-di-dah' survives best in the heavily industrial areas.[1]

Especially in the case of the southern working class a certain drift towards middle class attitudes was evident, particularly among the better paid workers.

Orwell's Experience of the Working Class

As in the case of the upper and middle classes, Orwell's comments on the working class were based on his personal experiences. His knowledge of tramps and outcastes was the result of extended periods spent with these people, described fully in his book Down and Out in Paris and London (1933) and in parts of A Clergyman's Daughter (1935). He also describes outcaste life in various essays, notably "The Spike" (1931), "Hop-Picking" (1931), "Common Lodging Houses" (1932) and "Clink" (1932). Orwell gives as his reason for his extraordinary interest in this section of society his feelings of guilt acquired in Burma.[1] But there was more to it than that; for Orwell had an almost clinical fascination with life in a totally alien culture, and seems to have been constantly on the look-out for "interesting experiences."[2]

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[1] Orwell, "The English People," in Collected Essays, III, 37.

It was comparatively easy for Orwell to become immersed in outcaste life. As he states, "You can become a tramp simply by putting on the right clothes and going to the nearest casual ward."[3] Even a very obvious upper-class accent did not impede his assimilation into the group, for tramps came from all over the British Isles and were used to hearing strange, unrecognisable accents from their fellows.[4] Only occasionally was Orwell given special treatment on account of his background, and this was always by people who, being of a higher class than the tramps, recognised that Orwell had somehow 'come down in the world.' On one occasion, on entering a casual ward (known as a 'spike') the Tramp Major, "a gruff soldierly man of forty, who gave tramps no more ceremony than sheep at a dipping pond" examined Orwell closely and asked him if he was a gentleman. Orwell replied that he supposed he was, to which the Tramp Major commented, "Well that's bloody bad luck guvnor." Orwell was subsequently given the coveted task of helping to prepare the workhouse meals in the adjoining building, which meant he was given a good meal, in contrast with the tramps who received the 'casual diet' of skilly (a watery oatmeal broth), bread and tea.[1]

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[1] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 129.

[2] Orwell, "Clink," in Collected Essays, I, 119.

[3] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 136.

[4] Ibid., p. 135.

Except for the rare occasions when his social degradation brought him sympathy, Orwell managed to live very much as the outcastes did themselves. In Paris he took the most despised job of all, that of the 'plongeur,' washing dishes and running errands in the disgusting kitchens of fashionable restaurants. In England he almost starved on a number of occasions, begging with other tramps, and sleeping in Trafalgar Square.[2] He even trod the roads to the hop fields of Kent, described by Jack London thirty years earlier.[3] On one occasion he experimented with breaking the law by getting himself drunk, and was greatly disappointed when his case before the magistrate was dismissed, since that meant he did not get much of a chance to see the inside of English jails, having only been in custody for a few hours. Altogether, he managed to sample a good many aspects of outcaste life. Yet at no time did he really identify with the down-and-outs; he always was the observer in some sense at least. From a letter he wrote to a friend, it appears that Orwell objected to his first book being titled *The Confessions of a Down and Out*; to put his objection in his own words, "I am protesting against this as I don't answer to the name of a down-and-out."[1] Orwell's motives were always that of the writer who wants to see how things really are. To write with conviction, he felt, required experience, preferably unusual experience.

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[1] Orwell, "The Spike," in Collected Essays, I, 59.

[2] Orwell, A Clergyman's Daughter, Ch. 3.

[3] Jack London, People of the Abyss, Ch. XIV.

Although one's admiration for Orwell's single-minded perseverance may be muted by the discovery that these forays were deliberately contrived, at the same time Orwell must be credited with having an altogether unusual sense of purpose in his self-imposed tasks. At any time he could have escaped from the hunger and discomfort; he could have contacted his aunt in Paris, or his friends and family in England when he was penniless and hungry. Yet he resisted the temptation, to which Jack London had succumbed. London, after a night spent outside with the homeless, had bought himself a good breakfast with a sovereign kept for emergencies, and had returned at once to lodgings where a bath and change of clothes were available.[2]

There was little of this quality of 'total immersion' in Orwell's experience of the working class proper. In fact most of his experience of ordinary working class life came in a trip to the north which lasted for barely two months. Gollancz had commissioned Orwell to write a book for the Left Book Club, and advanced him £500 for expenses.

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[1] Letter to Eleanor Jaques, 18th Nov. 1932, in *Collected Essays*, I, 130.

[2] London, *People of the Abyss*, p. 85.

The fact that Orwell expected the book to do well explains his rather brusk, business-like manner in approaching the task - a manner which contrasts sharply with his attitude to the down-and-out experience.

Given this attitude, it is not surprising that Orwell was unable to fit in very well with the northern working class. As he himself confessed (exaggerating the length of his experience):

> For some months[1] I lived entirely in coal-miners' houses. I ate my meals with the family, I washed in the kitchen sink, I shared my bedrooms with miners, drank beer with them, played darts with them, talked with them by the hour together. But though I was among them and I hope and trust that they did not find me a nuisance, I was not one of them, and they knew it even better than I did. However much you like them, however interesting you find their conversation, there is always the accursed itch of class difference, like the pea under the princess's mattress.[2]

In his "Road to Wigan Pier Diary" Orwell describes a similar experience at the shelter of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (N.U.W.M.). The men were anxious to supply Orwell with the information he sought, but, Orwell complained, they would not treat him as an equal, and insisted on calling him 'Sir' or 'Comrade.'

It was perhaps rather premature of Orwell to put down this sense of non-acceptance to infrangible class barriers. At least part of the explanation must lie with his own attitude: he was in a hurry to return to London, to the prospect of literary success, marriage (he married a couple of months later, in June 1936), and the village store which he was running in Wallington. From the account given by Joe Kennan, who went to great trouble to show Orwell the northern way of life, and who even arranged to take him down a coalmine, it seems that Orwell was in some important respects indifferent to his hosts:

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[1] Writing in 1947, this two months' experience had become "many months" (Preface to the Ukrainian edition of Animal Farm, Collected Essays, III, 456).

[2] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 136.

> Several of the boys really on the Left doubted Orwell's sincerity. Because he was very cynical and certainly never expressed any thanks for anything that was done for him. For instance he had one full meal, he had several snacks on other occasions. But he never showed any appreciation of hospitality, or anything like that. He was kind of up in the air and a snob in some ways, and was trying to come down to earth and find what things were really like.[1]

Kennan was rather disappointed and hurt by the fact that Orwell did not send him a copy of The Road to Wigan Pier as an acknowledgement of his assistance.

There is consequently a touch of both detachment and complacency in Orwell's attitude, which occasionally comes to light in his reportage in The Road to Wigan Pier. Certainly there is still strong evidence in the book of his old curiosity about life in a different culture, and a degree of outrage at the bad conditions, but there are sections in the book where Orwell's disinterested curiosity overrides his natural compassion. In the "Diary," for example, and also in the book, he describes an occasion when, on visiting an unemployed family who had been served a notice to quit by the landlord, the woman looked to Orwell, the gentleman-observer, for help. It did not appear to cross Orwell's mind that he might in this case have used his influence to help the family; he was so completely involved in making an accurate observation of their way of life.[2]

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[1] Joe Kennan, "The Road to the Left," T. V. script, 1970, quoted by Ian Hamilton, "Along the Road to Wigan Pier," cited by Miriam Gross (ed.), The World of George Orwell, p. 59.

[2] Orwell, "Wigan Pier Diary," in Collected Essays, I, 199.

On carefully reviewing the evidence, it is not possible to give a particularly flattering interpretation of Orwell's motives in studying the working class. In the case of his exploits among the outcastes, the driving force seems to be as much a self-imposed test of his physical stamina as an anthropological enquiry into social conditions; whereas in the case of the northern experience Orwell was unnecessarily anxious to play the part of a newspaper reporter, whose one concern was to complete his task and depart as soon as possible. However, Orwell's failings in this respect do not undermine the value of his observations which still prove to be a valuable analysis of working class culture and education.

Working Class Home Culture

A study of the English working class, like any anthropology, must make its point of departure with a description of the family and its role in working class culture. As far as Orwell was concerned, the working class were blessed with a kind of family that had little or nothing in common with the typical middle class family. The middle classes, Orwell asserts, had a concept of family that was almost tyrannical; the middle class man had "the deadly weight of family hanging round his neck like a millstone"; he had "scores of relations nagging him and badgering him night and day for failing to 'get on.'" Above all, the male of the aspidistra class was cursed with a nagging wife.[1] The working class man, says Orwell, had none of these things, and therefore must have been fairly happy with his family life.[2]

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[1] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 103. [2] Ibid.

Orwell does not seem to have got closer to his subject than this. He noticed the obvious fact that there was a very strict definition of sex roles among the northern working class, and that the 'Mary Ann' husband who did too much around the house was somewhat despised.[1] This observation cannot, however, be taken to be valid for all situations; indeed contemporary sociological research seems to suggest that the working class mother is in fact the dominant personality in the family,[2] and not the working class man as Orwell suggests. The man's status within the family seems to depend very much on his capacity as a breadwinner, and in the eventuality of unemployment or retirement, he tends to lose his status, becoming a rather diminutive figure. Richard Hoggart, who was brought up in the working class industrial north quotes his own experience to support further the sociological theory that working class families are essentially matrifocal, the mother in middle age being the pivot of her home and extended family.[3]

Given the limitations of his experience, it is perhaps surprising that Orwell's observations should not have strayed further from the facts. Obviously his study lacks the precision of a novel such as Love on the Dole by Walter Greenwood, who came from the working class himself. Written in the Depression period, this novel brings out details of working class life that are conspicuously absent in Orwell's observations. It shows, for example, how dependent the working class of the period were on pawnshops, where clothing was taken on Monday and returned on Friday, or on clothing clubs which provided clothes 'on tick,' and grocery stores which supplied food on credit. Orwell did not realise the extent of this dependence, which led to a high degree of exploitation. From Hoggart's evidence, it appears that this tendency of the working class to resort to credit may well have survived the war. These aspects of working-class life-style did not come into Orwell's personal experience, so he did not devote any time to them - even though he had certainly read Love on the Dole and seen the stage play.[1]

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[1] Orwell, "Wigan Pier Diary," in Collected Essays, I, 199.

[2] See Michael Young, Family and Kinship in East London (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957).

[3] Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p. 38.

Orwell, then, was not sufficiently knowledgeable to be able to give an accurate portrait of working class life. Nevertheless, he made up for his inexperience by being perceptive in other ways. He realised, for example, that the working class were profoundly influenced by the newspapers and magazines they read, so he consequently made a careful study of working class reading material. He was thus able to make some valid inferences about working class life and attitudes.

There was nothing complex about the way he set about these researches. He found he could accumulate a wealth of information by simply taking a walk in the working class end of town. As he explained,

> You never walk through any poor quarter in any big town without coming across a small newsagent's shop. The general appearance of these shops is always much the same: a few posters for the Daily Mail and the News of the World outside, a poky little window with sweet bottles and packets of Players, and a dark interior smelling of licorice allsorts and festooned from floor to ceiling with viley printed twopenny papers, most of them with lurid cover illustrations in three colours . . . Probably the contents of these shops is the best indication of what the mass of the English people really thinks and feels.[2]

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[1] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 77.

[2] Orwell, "Boys Weeklies," in Collected Essays, I, 505.

From women's magazines such as *Peg's Paper*, the *Family Star* and the *Oracle*, Orwell realised that the main concern of working class women was domestic life. The magazines' stories centred exclusively around domestic events, presented in an idealised sort of way:

> The short, complete stories, the special features of these papers, are generally of the 'came the dawn' type: the heroine narrowly escapes losing her 'boy' to a designing rival, or the 'boy' loses his job and has to postpone marriage, but presently gets a better job.[1]

Even the crimes treated in such stories were domestic crimes, such as bigamy, forgery and murder.

The magazines were unrealistic in their portrayal of working class life in other ways, for example, since they always presented a standard of living that was appreciably higher than that of their readership, and always avoided the stark realities of unemployment or work in the factories and mines. The papers catered for working class fantasies, in much the same way as the comic postcards to be found at seaside resorts catered for the specialised working class sense of humour. By far the most hard-worked theme among these cards was (and still is) sex, but this did not mean that nothing was taboo. According to Orwell,

> First favorite is probably the illegitimate baby. Typical captions: 'Could you exchange this lucky charm for a baby's feeding bottle?' 'She didn't ask me to the christening, so I'm not going to the wedding.' Also newlyweds, old maids, nude statues and women in bathing dresses. All of them are *ipso facto* funny, mere mention of them being enough to raise a laugh. The cuckoldry joke is rarely exploited, and there are no references to homosexuality.[2]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 527.

[2] Orwell, "The Art of Donald McGill," in *Collected Essays*, II, 786.

In a way, these postcards reflected the importance, even sactity, of family life to the working class. In this respect, working class 'decency' contrasted with the French working class humour, with which Orwell was equally familiar,

> The liaison, the illicit but more or less decorous love affair which used to be the stock joke of French comic papers, is not a postcard subject. And this reflects, on a comic level, the working class outlook which takes it as a matter of course that youth and adventure - almost, indeed, individual life - end with marriage.[1]

The few days spent at the sea-side were not the only occasion for frivolity in working class life. The boredom of a hum-drum existence could be alleviated by little extravagances, which, Orwell realised, were absolutely essential, even though they totally prevented any kind of deferred gratification or investment in the future:

> When you are unemployed, which is to say when you are underfed, harassed, bored and miserable, you don't want to eat dull, wholesome food. You want something a bit 'tasty.' There is always something cheap and pleasant to tempt you. Lets have three pennorth of chips! Run out and buy us a twopenny ice cream! Put the kettle on and lets have a nice cup of tea! That is how your mind works when you are at the P.A.C. level.[2]

Equally well, although Orwell did not discuss this alternative, you might go down to the local betting shop and put a shilling on a horse. Greenwood seems to indicate that the working class were addicted to betting, which tended to be just another form of exploitation.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 189.

[2] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 86.

[3] See Greenwood, Love on the Dole. The betting shops described in this book were run by the local profiteer.

The tendency to live from day to day was not, as the above passage might suggest, the exclusive life-style of the unemployed; it must be remembered that Unemployment benefits and Public Assistance Committee payments (P.A.C.) had to an extent levelled up as well as levelled down the incomes on which families were living; indeed during the Depression men with larger families tended to be, if anything, slightly better off than they had been before if their wages had been particularly low, since benefit payments were made in accordance with the size of family.[1]

Orwell understood, therefore, the psychology behind the need for cheap luxuries. They helped to make life more tolerable for the poor, giving them goods to which they had previously not had access. He realised, to put it in his own words, that "the psychological adjustment which the working class are visibly making is the best they could make under the circumstances."[2] This is not to say that he approved of the kind of goods that were flooding the market, for he felt them to be of unforgivably low quality.

Orwell respected this "psychological adjustment" in much the same way as he respected the physical stamina of the miners: "By no conceivable amount of effort or training," he admitted, "could I become a coal miner; the work would kill me in a few weeks."[3] He also appreciated the facets of working class life that are usually looked upon with a certain degree of condescension by people of his own class and background, "the pub, the football match, the 'nice cup of tea.'"[1] Orwell appreciated these things himself, taking pleasure in simple things like good strong tea and solid English cooking.[2] The warmth of a working class fireside scene, described in much the same way as he described the Sunday afternoon scene of Bowling's childhood,[3] seemed to evoke an extraordinary melancholy nostalgia for Orwell. This nostalgia is interesting because it concerned experiences which Orwell himself could never have known.

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[1] Public Assistance Committee payments came into effect after six weeks' Transition Benefit, to which the insurance paying worker was entitled by right, was exhausted. While under Unemployment Assistance Board payments the rate for a single man was 15 shillings a week; while the man on the 'charity' of the P.A.C. received 12 shillings, plus allowances for each child in both cases.

[2] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 80.

[3] Ibid., p. 29.

The working class family, inter-locked as it was with the other central features of working class life was, as Orwell saw it, uniquely 'decent.' The working class had proved its decency by its common-sense resistance to Fascism once the war had begun (although on occasions in the past it had allowed itself to be manipulated by Mosley); as a result, Orwell saw it as the guardian of the integrity of the nation. He contrasts the working class with the nation's rulers, making the sweeping comment: "It is universally agreed that the working classes are more moral than the upper classes."[4] It can be questioned whether any such consensus existed (it would be hard to imagine the upper classes agreeing to such a proposition), but the statement is typically Orwellian, made with the assurance of a bishop declaring the existence of God. It is also typical of Orwell's patriotic outlook at the beginning of the war, when he had found a cause definitely worth defending. As will be discussed later in this chapter, Orwell's evaluation of the working class was altogether more pessimistic in the late thirties.

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[1] In the late forties Orwell wrote a series of articles praising in turn English cooking, the 'nice cup of tea' (Orwell seems to have disliked the working class habit of stewing tea, but he recommends that it should be drunk strong, like the working class drink it) and the English pub. These articles can be found in Collected Essays, III, 56-68.

[2] Ibid.

[3] For a comparison of these two scenes see above p. 61.

[4] Orwell, "The English People," in Collected Essays, III, 25.

Similarly axiomatic for Orwell the patriot was the fact that the working class was free of the restrictive puritanical outlook of the middle classes:

> The English people proper, the working masses who make up seventy-five per cent of the population are not puritanical. The dismal theory of Calvinism never popularised itself in England as it did for a while in Wales and Scotland.[1]

The common man, in sum, was the repository of the nation's supply of 'common decency' and 'common sense.' Orwell felt certain that the English working class had virtues which the European working class, bamboozled by Fascism, did not share. It had enough perception to realise that the nation's leaders were not heroes, and it had also a long-standing suspicion of the military,[2] all of which Orwell felt was very healthy. When on leave, no officer in England, Orwell points out, dares to walk the streets in uniform as foreign officers would. Yet, at the same time, the working class had enough patriotism to be able to resist a foreign enemy to the limit of its power.

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn," in *Collected Essays*, II, 80.

Orwell found much the same kind of 'decency' among the outcaste group. They had, he found, a strict code of honesty and loyalty, and it was the rule for a tramp to be generous to his companions, sharing with them in times of good fortune, and passing on useful information. The touching conclusion to Orwell's essay "The Spike" comes after the description of a night in a casual ward, where Orwell had shared his smuggled tobacco supply (smoking in casual wards was prohibited, and tramps were searched on entry), with a tramp called Scotty. In the morning, when the tramps were scattering in various directions, Orwell was startled by a tap on the shoulder:

> It was little Scotty, who had run panting after us. He pulled a rusty tin box from his pocket. He wore a friendly smile, like a man who is repaying an obligation.
>
> 'Here y'are mate,' he said cordially. 'I owe you some fag ends. You stood me a smoke yesterday. The Tramp Major give me back my box of fag ends when we come out this morning. One good turn deserves another - here y'are.'
>
> And he put four sodden, debauched, loathly cigarette ends into my hand.[1]

Not all the tramp companions Orwell described had Scotty's virtues, but certainly the vast majority were endearing individuals, who could always be relied upon to help those less adept than themselves. Just such a person, a thief but generous and gay, was Nobby, who escorts the destitute Dorothy in A Clergyman's Daughter, and appears again in Orwell's memories of his hop-picking days. Nobby would also help out a friend in need, even if it meant stealing to do so. In short, Nobby and others like him had the same kind of 'common decency' that Orwell attributed to the working class; both had the generous, carefree attitude to life that Orwell so much admired.

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[1] Orwell, "The Spike," in Collected Essays, I, 66.

It is not difficult to deduce, from Orwell's evidence, the effect working class cultural background would have on the child. First of all, the firmly-bonded family with the strong mother-figure would provide a deep sense of security. It has been left to social observers since Orwell's time to study the strong bonding between individuals in the family, particularly between mother and daughter,[1] which is by far the most intense and influential human relationship that exists in well-established working class families. The tendency to purchase on credit (again not a theme much discussed by Orwell) would instill in the child a total disregard for the middle class philosophy of paying one's way and deferring gratification, which would likely be preached to little effect in the schools. From Orwell's study of working class reading material, particularly his essay "Boys' Weeklies,"[2] one realises that the working class child reading Gem or Magnet and the young woman reading Peg's Paper was encouraged to fantasise about a world where conditions were better than they were in reality, but which still retained the fairly rigid working class morality. This concept of morality would be further impressed upon the child by such things as comic postcards. The total effect of this environment would be one of 'decency.' The child would be encouraged to see itself as a part of a distinct culture that expected him to behave in accordance with a certain prescribed code of conduct, and which encouraged him to look upon himself as part of an organic community which had been built up over generations by the interaction of static family groupings.

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[1] For development of this theme see Michael Young's Family and Kinship in East London.

[2] Orwell, "Boys' Weeklies," in Collected Essays, I, 505-531.

So far the discussion has been limited to the positive aspects of working class culture, but there was a darker side to working class culture that Orwell also was prepared to discuss. The most de-humanising factor, as Orwell realised, was the severe poverty that had to be endured by so many. Occasionally, on his trip to the north, Orwell came across households which were extremely degenerate; as a result, at least in part, of poverty. A notorious example of this, taken from the pages of The Road to Wigan Pier was the Brookers' establishment where Orwell stayed as a lodger. Mr. Brooker did most of what was done of the housework, and it was he who was largely responsible for the dreadful food, and totally responsible for the big black thumb-print that hall-marked every slice of bread and butter. Mrs. Brooker, his wife, a supposed invalid, spent her life on the sofa, endlessly piling up around her soggy pieces of newspaper and moaning "It does seem 'ard, don't it now?" Not only did the Brookers keep lodgers, but they also carried on a moderate trade in decomposing 'black tripe' which they stored uncovered in the cellar and sold to their unemployed neighbours.[1] Of course it is very much an open question whether the Brookers' and other such households could have been improved if their incomes had been any higher.

Degeneracy of this kind was not exclusively the result of poverty and a lack of cleanliness; it was also the result of bad management. In another home where he lodged, Orwell compiled an inventory of the food left in the kitchen, and recorded it in his diary:

> One morning when washing in H's scullery I made an inventory of the following food: A piece of bacon about 5 pounds.

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[1] Orwell, Wigan Pier, pp. 5-12.

> About 2 pounds of shin of beef. About a pound and a half of liver (all these uncooked). The wreck of a monstrous meat pie (Mrs. H when baking a pie always made it in an enamelled basin such as is used for washing up in. Ditto with puddings). A dish containing 15 or 20 eggs. A number of small cakes. A flat fruit pie and a 'cake-a-pie' (pastry with currants in it). Various fragments of earlier pies. 6 large loaves and 12 small ones (I had seen Mrs. H. cook these the night before). Various odds and ends of butter, tomatoes, opened tins of milk, etc. There was also more food keeping warm in the oven in the kitchen.[1]

Food wastage in this household was undeniably excessive. Orwell also noticed that the diet was not a balanced one. The fact that the working class were ignorant of dietary principles was of course not their fault, however, and Orwell appreciated this.

A much better example of household management was provided by the miner's wife whom Orwell met later on his trip.[2] The woman gave Orwell an account of the money she spent every week and Orwell found that the only improvement he could suggest was that the carrots and vegetables could have been eaten raw, thus conserving both fuel and the goodness of the food. This family was living on an unemployment assistance allowance that gave them thirty-two shillings a week; and although they might conceivably have managed on slightly less, Orwell was probably correct in assuming that, had such economies been made by the working class unemployed, their allowances would have been cut.

Poverty, as it affected the working class, could either, therefore, lead to degeneracy, or it could be successfully combatted if the housewife was resourceful enough - and even then not without a great deal of difficulty, since there was no margin for extra expenses or medicine. The total general effect of poverty was de-humanising and Orwell not only realised this, but was able to express it in a concise and touching form. The glimpse he had of the woman and the drainpipe is an often-quoted passage, but it expresses all the degradation of poverty:

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[1] Orwell, "Wigan Pier Diary," in Collected Essays, I, 204.

[2] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 83.

> At the back of one of the houses a young woman was kneeling on the stones, poking a stick up the leaden waste-pipe which ran from the sink inside which I suppose was blocked. I had time to see everything about her - her sacking apron, her clumsy clogs, her arms reddened by the cold. She looked up as the train passed, and I was almost near enough to catch her eye. She had a round, pale face, the usual exhausted face of the slum girl who is twenty-five and looks forty, thanks to miscarriages and drudgery; and it wore for the second in which I saw it the most desolate hopeless expression I have ever seen. It struck me then that we are mistaken when we say 'It isn't the same for them as it would be for us,' and that people bred in slums can imagine nothing but slums. For what I saw in her face was not the ignorant suffering of an animal. She knew well enough what was happening to her - understood as well as I did how dreadful a destiny it was to be kneeling there in the bitter cold, on the slimy stones of a slum backyard, poking a stick up a foul drainpipe.[1]

The poverty of the northern working class was being perpetuated by a depression which was allowing a growing prosperity in other sectors of the economy. Orwell realised that this posed a social threat, since self-respecting working people were being forced into destitution. At the same time he felt, on balance, that it was unlikely that the working class would allow themselves to be pushed into the social category previously only occupied by vagrants and outcastes; working class culture and working class society was sufficiently strong to ride out the storm. "The old communal way of life has not yet broken up, tradition is still strong, and almost everyone has a family - potentially, therefore, a home,"[1] Orwell declared. In this respect the north appeared more stable than London, where the unemployment situation was in fact much less serious. For London was different, "London is the sort of whirlpool which draws derelict people towards it . . . you can go to pieces as you could not possibly do in a place where you had neighbours who knew you."[2] For Orwell, therefore, complete social disintegration seemed unlikely in the north. It is interesting that he completely ignored the possibility of active militancy on the part of the deprived unemployed, although this was the time of the hunger marches which were causing panic in London.

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[1] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 16.

The outcastes too were weakened and debilitated by their poverty. Physically most tramps and vagrants were absolute wrecks, as Orwell realised when he was subject, along with the other inmates of the 'spike' to a medical examination:

> We stood shivering naked to the waist in two long ranks in the passage. The filtered light, bluish cold, lighted us up with unmerciful clarity. No one can imagine, unless he has seen such a thing, what pot-bellied, degenerate curs were looked. Shock heads, hairy, crumpled faces, hollow chests, flat feet, sagging muscles - every kind of malformation and physical rottenness were there. All were flabby and discoloured, as all tramps are under their deceptive sunburn.[3]

Not only were the tramps ill-fed and thoroughly unhealthy, they were also continually humiliated by a system which took pains to show that it despised such people. Most of the humiliation was totally unnecessary - for example, the boredom which was forced onto them. For the entire weekend at the spike, the tramps were confined to a room where they were not even allowed to smoke. Orwell describes somewhat condescendingly, the acute boredom which was suffered:

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[1] Ibid., p. 71.

[2] Ibid.,

[3] Orwell, "The Spike," in Collected Essays, I, 61.

> Most of the tramps spent ten consecutive hours in this dreary room. It is hard to imagine how they put up with it. I have come to think that boredom is the worst of all a tramp's evils, worse than hunger and discomfort, worse even than the constant feeling of being socially disgraced. It is a silly piece of cruelty to confine an ignorant man all day with nothing to do; it is like chaining a dog in a barrel. Only an educated man, who has consolations within himself, can endure confinement. Tramps, unlettered types as nearly all of them are, face their poverty with blank, resourceless minds. Fixed for ten hours on a comfortless bench, they know no way of occupying themselves, and if they think at all it is to whimper about bad luck and pine for work.[1]

The treatment to which tramps and vagrants were subjected was deliberately callous, as can be seen from Orwell's description of the food wastage after the Sunday dinner in the adjoining workhouse:

> The wastage was astonishing; great dishes of beef and bucketfuls of bread and vegetables, were pitched away like rubbish, and then defiled with tea leaves. I filled five dustbins to overflowing with good food. And while I did so my fellow tramps were sitting two hundred yards away in the spike, their bellies half filled with the spike dinner of everlasting bread and tea, and perhaps two cold boiled potatoes each in honour of Sunday. It appeared that the food was thrown away from deliberate policy, rather than it should be given to the tramps.[2]

Orwell felt that such a policy was Victorian and unnecessary, and suggested that the casual wards should be provided with kitchen gardens where the tramps could work in return for a reasonable meal, thus saving their self-respect.[1] As things were, tramps spent their miserable lives wandering from spikes (where they could only stay one night), to church halls and Salvation Army hostels, always the victims of missionary zeal. As Orwell commented "It is curious how people take it for granted that they have the right to preach at you and pray over you as soon as your income falls below a certain level."[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 62.

[2] Ibid., p. 63.

The twentieth century it seems, had brought with it numerous improvements in social welfare that had benefitted the majority of the working class, who now had greater security than ever before, but the tiny sub-group of the working class that comprised tramps and vagrants had benefitted little by the progress made elsewhere.

Poverty was therefore at the root of those negative aspects of working class culture that surrounded the child. The fact that adult life was so hard was perhaps the explanation behind the characteristic working class indulgence towards children. Yet, at the time Orwell was making his observations, the children were undoubtedly suffering, their case being particularly unfortunate if they belonged to a home which was badly-managed. The poverty of the outcaste group would not have substantially affected the children, since there were few women and fewer small children among this group. Yet the wretchedness of the outcastes formed a background to working class life, constantly reminding adults and children alike of the depths to which it was possible to sink so very easily.

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[1] Orwell, Down and Out, p. 183.

[2] Ibid., p. 161.

Working Class Schooling

The fact that working class children attended school until fourteen or fifteen years old did not mean that the working class was particularly concerned about the education their children were receiving. Among the working class of both industrial and agricultural areas, government legislation with regard to compulsory schooling had traditionally been regarded as a calculated attempt to limit working class family incomes. It was clear to this class that the ever-increasing number of years which a child was expected to spend in school did not lead to a proportional increase in income on leaving school. For this reason, the working class had no real faith in schooling, and would rarely have considered paying fees for it. Orwell considered this attitude to be almost a defining characteristic of the working class.[1]

The working class therefore sent their children to state schools, which were compulsory, free and manned exclusively by the middle classes. It is not difficult to imagine the conflict of values that existed within these schools, for education, as instituted by the middle classes, was a monument to the philosophy of what Orwell would call 'getting on' and competitiveness, both concepts which were essentially alien to the working class as Orwell described it. The working class had less of a Darwinian and more of an organic view of the society in which they lived, which as they saw it depended on family loyalty rather than competition.

Orwell's observations on the state of working class schools are limited, probably on account of the fact that his experience of these schools was non-existent. He did, however, have a shrewd idea about working class attitudes to formal education, as appears from this passage:

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[1] Orwell, "Boys Weeklies," in Collected Essays, I, 511.

> And again, take the working class attitude to 'education.' How different it is from ours, and how immensely sounder! Working people often have a vague reverence for learning in others, but where 'education' touches their own lives they see through it and reject it by a healthy instinct.[1]

The enforced education of the school never won the support of the working classes, least of all from the adolescents, who, as Orwell describes, were anxious to prove their manhood in the outside world:

> There is not one working class boy in a thousand who does not pine for the day when he will leave school. He wants to be doing real work, not wasting his time on ridiculous rubbish like history and geography. To the working class, the notion of staying at school until you are nearly grown-up seems merely contemptible and unmanly.[2]

Since this was the attitude of the working class to the schools which they were obliged to attend, the schools could have only had a very minor impact on the development of the children, and therefore Orwell's lack of experience in this respect is not so very unfortunate. Yet in making the statements that he did, by approving of working class rejection of schooling, Orwell was touching on an important theoretical problem that has still not been solved today. He does not seem to have thought through his attitude on this issue. There is no doubt that he despised the tramps for their mental vacuity and lack of education which he supposed made a man 'resourceful,' and yet his only comment on wofking class schooling was that it was a waste of time. In his descriptions of children at work in the hopfields, for example, with reference to the tiring work the children had to do, he commented "I don't suppose it did them more harm than school."[1] All one can infer from this evidence is that he felt that the schools as constituted had nothing to offer the working classes; presumably he felt that they could be restructured more appropriately, but he offers no guide-lines in this respect.

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[1] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 103. Self-education must be distinguished from Orwell's concept of schooling. Illustrations of the self-educated working man can be found in Greenwood's Love on the Dole in the figure of Larry. A discussion of the extent and importance of self-education particularly as it was organised by the Welsh and Northumberland miners during the Depression can be found in the 1933 report to the Pilgrim Trust entitled Men Without Work.

[2] Ibid. A further illustration of this attitude can be found in Greenwood's Love on the Dole, where the young Harry feels that he has to reject the security of a 'scrivener' or clerical job in order to join the ranks of the factory workers, even though he knew they were being laid off. The factory workers, to him were "men engaged in men's work."

The Working Class as a Force for Change

In the case of the upper class and middle classes it was possible to consider the class as a result, in part, of the education it had received at home and in school. Certain particular characteristics of these classes seemed to be directly the result of the structure and policy of their schools. In the case of the working class it is not possible - at least from the evidence Orwell provides - to see such a causal relationship. The working class was too different from their schools to be substantially moulded by them. They did not pay for their education, and consequently they did not have any control over it. The working class, therefore, is almost exclusively the product of its own home culture, and the impact of this on the child has already been discussed.

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[1] Orwell, "Hop Picking," in Collected Essays, I, 85.

However, when discussing the working class as a whole, certain other statements can be made with regard to their role in society at large, and on this subject Orwell has some observations to make. The potential of this class was manifestly of interest to Orwell since it was obviously not at the time in a position of power and influence such as were the classes above it. Also Orwell, as a presumed socialist, was of the belief that the working class should be given a dominating or at least influential status in English society. It is the precise nature of this belief that needs to be further explored.

Orwell realised that the working class was to a large extent an alienated group. This alienation was first of all cultural. Orwell was sensitive to the fact that the bawdy sense of humour which in Shakespearean times had been shared by all classes, was in the twentieth century limited to the working class, and despised by the more 'cultured' middle and upper classes:

> In the past the mood of the comic postcard could enter into the central stream of literature, and jokes barely different from McGill's could casually be uttered between murders in Shakespeare's tragedies. This is no longer possible, and a whole category of humour, integral to our literature till 1800 or thereabouts, had dwindled down to these ill-drawn postcards leading a barely legal existence in cheap stationers' windows.[1]

The alienation was not only cultural, however, for it was evident to Orwell that the working class felt cut off from, and to an extent inferior to, the classes above them. Specifically, the working class had what Hoggart has since called a "them and us" mentality."[2]

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[1] Orwell, "The Art of Donald McGill," in Collected Essays, I, 194.

[2] Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, Ch. 3.

Orwell saw this attitude as deference to those in authority, and to illustrate it he quotes an experience he had in Sheffield when he had mentioned to some companions that he wished to obtain some statistics from the Town Clerk. Orwell describes his companions as being "much more forcible characters" than himself, and he was therefore astonished to find that the men were too shy to accompany him to the office. On the subject of the statistics, Orwell's companions said "He might give them to _you_, but he wouldn't to _us_."[1] Such a sense of inferiority vis-a-vis the authorities must have raised doubts in Orwell's mind as to the likelihood of the working class emerging as a dynamic force for change.

Orwell also had doubts about working class leaders. "As soon as a working man gets an official post in the Trade Union or goes into Labour politics," Orwell commented, "he becomes middle class whether he will or no, i.e. by fighting the bourgeoisie he becomes bourgeois."[2] As an example of this process Orwell gives a description of Wal Hannington, leader of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, whom he heard speak at a public meeting. Orwell was not very impressed, and labelled him as a "bourgeois Communist."[3] The fact that Hannington was an official Moscow-line communist was not likely to endear him to Orwell, but it is quite likely also that Orwell resented the man's militancy, for essentially Orwell was not very revolutionary-minded.

Drawing on his knowledge of history, Orwell points out that the working class has rarely been led by working class men; its leaders have usually been middle class intellectuals. He refers to the suppression of the Paris Commune, when the troops were rounding up the leaders to be shot. Not knowing who the ring leaders were, it was decided by the authorities that those of better class should be picked out, on the principle that they must have been the leaders.[1]

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[1] Orwell, "Wigan Pier Diary," in _Collected Essays_, I, 224.

[2] _Ibid._, p. 198.

[3] _Ibid._, p. 201.

Orwell was also disappointed at the lack of international consciousness among the working class. He castigates them, for example, for failing to express solidarity with the "coloured working class" of the Empire.[2] He also accuses them of being xenophobic with regard to foreigners; as he states: "the English are outstanding in their horror of foreign habits."[3]

All these factors tended to shake Orwell's confidence in the working class as a force for change in the inter-war period. Bearing in mind the fact that he was an avowed socialist, it is interesting to contrast the "Wigan Pier Diary" with The Road to Wigan Pier as it was published. From the comparison one learns that Orwell was in fact far more sceptical about the potential of the working class than he was prepared to admit to the Left Book Club. One finds, for example, in the diary a description of a Mosley rally he attended in Barnsley which does not present the working class in a particularly flattering light:

> After the preliminary booing the (mainly) working class audience was easily bamboozled by Mosley speaking from

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[1] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 44.

[2] Letter to Jack Common, Dec. 1938, Collected Essays, I, 407.

[3] Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn," in Collected Essays, II, 85.

> as it were the Socialist angle condemning the treachery of successive governments towards the workers. The blame for everything was put on mysterious international gangs of Jews who are said to be financing, among other things, the British Labour Party and the Soviet . . . Afterwards there were questions as usual, and it struck me how easy it is to bamboozle an uneducated audience if you have prepared beforehand a set of repartees with which to evade awkward questions, eg. M kept extolling Italy and Germany, but when questioned about concentration camps, etc. always replied 'We have no foreign models; what happens in Germany need not happen here.'[1]

On another occasion on his trip, when visiting a Yorkshire pub with his sister, Orwell noticed that of the numerous 'regulars' discussing the European situation, only two were not pro-German in their sympathies. This he found deeply shocking.[2]

The Wigan episode obviously raised questions in Orwell's mind about the feasibility of 'dictatorship of the proletariat.' His doubts seemed to be justified by his subsequent Spanish experience, where a possible victory of the Left was finally destroyed by the disunity of the Left itself. By the time war had broken out, Orwell was no longer a socialist of any kind, and he seems to have fallen back into a more conservative view of society.

Admittedly, there was still a place for the working class in the new society he imagined, but his eulogy to the virtues of the English People is essentially patronising. More revealing than his self-conscious essays on English society which he made in the early war period are the occasional casual asides he makes in other writings, which throw light on his real attitude to the working class. For example, in his essay on Gissing he chastises that writer for his lack of a sufficiently liberal outlook:

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[1] Orwell, "Wigan Pier Diary," in Collected Essays, I, 231.

[2] Ibid., p. 225.

> In a mild way his outlook is reactionary, from lack of foresight rather than from ill-will. Having been obliged to live among them, he regarded the working class as savages, and in saying so he was merely being intellectually honest; he did not see that they were capable of becoming civilised if given slightly better opportunities.[1]

Similarly, elsewhere, with regard to working class taste, Orwell commented:

> But the solution is not to congratulate the ordinary man on his bad taste. The solution, ultimately, is through the education which Mr. Agate disbelieves in.[2]

One finds, therefore, that Orwell's opinions regarding working class potential for changing the social order has come a full circle. Starting with an attempt at sympathising with working class culture and life-style, and hoping, presumably, for a socialistic revolution that would bring these people to a more influential position in society, Orwell had moved over to a typically middle class attitude by the time the war had broken out. Very probably these attitudes had been playing in his mind all along.

Evaluation

It has been seen in this chapter that Orwell has a great deal to say on the subject of working class culture - the culture that does so much to form the child. The warmth and security of working class family and community life, tempered to some extent by poverty, encompasses almost the entire range of influential forces affecting the developing child. As Orwell appreciated, the school was not a significant factor since the child had little in common with his instructors, not sharing their value system.

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[1] Orwell, "George Gissing," in Collected Essays, IV, 491.

[2] "A controversy: Orwell:Agate," in Collected Essays, III, 294.

The necessity or otherwise of providing schooling for the working class therefore emerges as a difficult problem. Orwell himself is not much help in this regard since his own position was ambiguous, and changed over time. On the one hand - and this was particularly in his 'socialist' period in the thirties - Orwell was sympathetic to working class rejection of schooling; yet on the other hand - and this is an attitude that emerges more and more clearly with the passing of the years- Orwell seems to have thought that the working class needed instruction from their betters. The tramps in the spike had "Blank, resourceless minds,"[1] Mosley's "uneducated audience" were easily bamboozled.[2] But the working classes could be improved, they are "capable of being civilised if given slightly better opportunities."[3] Even working class "bad taste" which Orwell himself had earlier defended, could be remedied: "the solution lies in education."[4] One is forced to conclude, therefore, that Orwell's ideas on working class education were inconsistent, and as much the result of the traditional prejudices of his class as of his socialist persuasions.

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[1] Orwell, "The Spike," in Collected Essays, I, 61.

[2] Orwell, "Wigan Pier Diary," in Collected Essays, I, 231.

[3] Orwell, "George Gissing," in Collected Essays, IV, 491. .

[4] "A controversy: Orwell:Agate," in Collected Essays, III, 294.

CHAPTER VI

THINGS TO COME

A Missed Opportunity

It has been seen that although Orwell was oriented towards socialism for much of his life, he was never a very convincing socialist. Indeed, he was to move away from that philosophy in his later years. It will be the main concern of this chapter, therefore, to trace Orwell's changing expectations for English society over the last years of his life, from the early war years until his death in 1950. The slow shift in his attitude will be seen to be an unbroken trend, since nothing to be found in his last approach will appear totally unrelated to his ideas as they were expressed in the thirties.

Orwell's opinions about the direction of current trends at the outbreak of war was fairly optimistic. He anticipated and desired a better society where class distinctions would somehow be abolished. How exactly this was to be achieved was not spelled out, but there is little to suggest that Orwell expected a revolution. Once the war had started, his attitude changed slightly. Believing that a revolution was now possible, he expected the middle class to join with the working class in order to overthrow the existing government and install a socialist government. The reason why he hoped for and expected this eventuality was to be found in his attitude to the ruling class which, as has been discussed, he felt to be incompetent. Orwell describes this moment of near-revolution (once it had passed) in his London Letter to Partisan Review of January 1941:

> In the summer (of 1940) what amounted to a revolutionary situation existed in England, though there was no one to take advantage of it. After twenty years of being fed on sugar and water the nation had realised what its rulers were like, and there was a widespread readiness for sweeping economic and social changes, combined with an absolute determination to prevent invasion. At that moment, I believe, the opportunity existed to isolate the monied class and swing the mass of the nation behind a policy in which resistance to Hitler and destruction of class privileges were combined. Clement Greenberg's remark in Horizon, that the working class is the only class in England that seriously means to defeat Hitler, seems to me quite untrue. The bulk of the middle class are just as anti-Hitler as the working class, and their morale is probably more reliable. The fact which Socialists, especially when they are looking at the English scene from the outside, seldom seem to me to grasp, is that the patriotism of the middle classes is a thing to be made use of. The people who stand up for 'God Saving the King' would readily transfer their loyalty to a Socialist regime if they were handled with the minimum of tact. However, in the summer months no one saw the opportunity, the Labour leaders (with the possible exception of Bevin) allowed themselves to be made the tame cats of the government, and when the invasion failed to come off and the air raids were less terrible than everyone had expected, the quasi-revolutionary mood ebbed away.[1]

Orwell himself would have been more than anxious to participate in such a revolution as he describes. It is interesting to note that the revolution he favoured was not the typical Marxist overthrow of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat, but an alliance of the middle and lower classes to defeat the government and replace it, most likely, with a Labour Party type of leadership. Orwell's use of the word 'revolution' is therefore misleading, for his ideas have far more in common with the Utopian socialists than with most revolutionaries.

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[1] Orwell, London Letter to Partisan Review, 3rd Jan. 1941, in Collected Essays, II, 67.

The revolution, however, did not come to pass, and Orwell once again passively accepted the present state of affairs as a starting point for his proposals. He had behaved in much the same way immediately before the war, when he had rejected military confrontation with the fascist powers not because he was a pacifist (he was not), but because he hoped for an international movement to overthrow the national governments and so prevent war. This was the same unrealistic faith that had been held by so many at the outbreak of the First World War. As soon as war had broken out, however, Orwell was anxious to offer his services to the nation, making the comment "Now we are in this bloody war we have got to win it and I would like to lend a hand."[1] As in the case of the missed 'revolution,' Orwell allowed his patriotism to dictate his opinion on events, and, given the new state of affairs, was prepared to argue the case that England was, after all, one nation, lovable in her eccentricities. Orwell describes English society using the reassuring analogy of the family, although he admitted it was a rather badly-run family:

> England is not the jewelled isle of Shakespeare's much quoted message, nor is it the inferno depicted by Dr. Goebbels. More than either it resembles a family, a rather stuff Victorian family, with not many black sheep in it but with all its cupboards bursting with skeletons. It has rich relations which have to be kow-towed to and poor relations who are thoroughly sat upon, and there is a deep conspiracy of silence over the source of the family income. It is a family in which the young are generally thwarted and most of the power is in the hands of irresponsible uncles and bedridden aunts. Still, it is a family. It has a private language and its common memories, and at the approach of the enemy it closes its ranks. A family with the wrong members in control - that, perhaps, is the nearest one can get to describing England in a phrase.[2]

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[1] Orwell, London Letter to *Parisan Review*, 3rd Jan. 1941, in *Collected Essays*, II, 67.

[2] Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn," in *Collected Essays*, II, 88.

By the beginning of 1941, therefore, Orwell can be said to have fully completed the transition from 'socialist' to patriot. His fundamental conservatism had at last fully established itself. To date, he had not proved to be very accurate in his predictions, but this did not deter him from continuing to analyse the political scene and making suggestions for improvements.

The 'New Middle Class' of the Future

Most of Orwell's ideas of the early war period which relate to his anticipations of the future can be found in his 1941 essay, "The Lion and the Unicorn." In this essay he outlines his ideas about the 'new middle class' which he perceived to be emerging (although he did not give it this name):

> One of the most important developments in England during the last twenty years has been the upward and downward extension of the middle class. It has happened on such a scale as to make the old classifications of society into capitalists, proletarians and petty bourgeois (small property owners) almost obsolete.[1]

This 'new middle class' was different from the declining middle classes already discussed because it was manifestly of the new order, and likely to survive. It cannot be equated with the healthier sections of the old middle class (that is, the better-paid professionals which Orwell has failed to comment upon) because its occupational status was not that high. Being the technologists and engineers of the new society, they tended to occupy an intermediate social position. Orwell does not seem to have had any real liking for this class and its culture, as appears from the following extract:

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 96.

> It is a rather restless, cultureless life, centring round tinned food, Picture Post, the radio and the internal combustion engine. It is a civilisation in which children grow up with an intimate knowledge of magnetoes and in complete ignorance of the Bible. To that civilisation belong the people who are most at home in and most definitely of the modern world, the technicians, the higher paid skilled workers, the airmen and their mechanics, the radio experts, film producers, popular journalists and industrial chemists. They are the indeterminate stratum at which the old class distinctions are beginning to break down.[1]

Orwell probably felt at odds with this class because he himself was not "of the modern world," remaining until the end of his life just a little old fashioned, living in spartan conditions, and never owning a car. He was, moreover, closely in touch with the past, especially the literature of the past, and had little understanding of technology and its potential. This becomes apparent in his portrayal of the 1984 world, which resembles bombed-out London in appearance rather than the technological wonderland of Huxley's Brave New World.

Orwell states in "The Lion and the Unicorn" that the new middle class first made its appearance after 1918. This was the first occasion when people of indeterminate class, the sort of people who could not be "placed in an instant by clothes, manners and accent,"[2] made an appearance. The new class, Orwell noticed, tended to gravitate towards the new townships, the light industry areas and the arterial roads on the outskirts of major cities, where, incidentally, it had been noticed by J. B. Priestley, who made a trip round England in 1933. Like Orwell, Priestley had recognised this class to be the class of the future.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 98.

[2] Ibid.

[3] J. B. Priestley, English Journey (London: Heinemann, 1934).

The new egalitarianism of life-style, clothing and consumption patterns which Orwell had noticed was making a marked impact on the working class, was essential to the existence of this new class. Orwell admitted that there were "wide gradations of income" within this class, but mass production enabled even the poorest members to purchase the luxuries of modern life in some form.

Not only did this new class benefit from industrial mass production, but it also found itself benefiting from the inter-war building boom. Orwell does not mention this point, but the new middle class was the group that acquired most of the four and a half million homes that were built by private contractors and local government during this period. The urban poor, for whom the homes had originally been intended, acquired the accommodation vacated by the new class.[1]

The new middle class, therefore, provided a formula for a new "classlessness" as Orwell called it, which found its ultimate expression in the "naked democracy of the swimming pools."[2] In principle, Orwell approved of this new classlessness since it marked the end of the "old class distinctions," but he could not help feeling that there had been a cultural loss. Orwell, who had been one of the foremost critics of the class system of the past, now was beginning to appreciate the more positive aspects of the old social classes, which the new middle class did not share.

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[1] Mowat, Britain Between the Wars, Ch. 9.

[2] Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn," in Collected Essays, II, 98.

Recommendations for Meritocracy

Although it is true that the new middle class presented Orwell with a dilemma, heralding as it did some changes of which he approved and some of which he disapproved, this did not mean that he was unwilling to finally make some kind of commitment, either with the old or with the new. His final decision would seem to be with the new. In this same essay, he put forward his recommendations for social reform which undoubtedly suggest that he was prepared to facilitate the path of existing trends. The cause for which Orwell stood was his own particular brand of 'English Socialism' which he wanted to see implemented. He drew up these proposals in the summer of 1940 when he was writing the draft of "The Lion and the Unicorn," and therefore the proposals can be seen to be an attempt to inspire the 'revolutionary' mood which Orwell felt was then sweeping Britain. His proposed programme is summed up under six points, the abbreviated form of which follows:

> I suggest that the following six-point programme is the kind of thing we need. The first three points deal with England's internal policy, the other three with the Empire and the world:
>
> 1. Nationalisation of land, mines, railways, banks and major industries.
> 2. Limitation of incomes, on such a scale that the highest tax-free income in Britain does not exceed the lowest by more than ten to one.
> 3. Reform of the educational system along democratic lines.
> 4. Immediate Dominion status for India, with the power to secede once the war is over.
> 5. Formation of an Imperial Council, in which the coloured peoples are to be represented.
> 6. Declaration of an alliance with China, Abyssinia and all other victims of Fascist powers.
>
> The general tendency of this programme is unmistakable. It aims quite frankly at turning this war into a revolutionary war and England into a Socialist democracy. I have deliberately included in it nothing that the simplest person could not

> understand and see the reason for. In the form in which I have put it, it could be put on the front page of the Daily Mirror.[1]

This last comment indicates Orwell's confidence in the feasibility of his programme. It is interesting to notice, however, that only three of the points are concerned with domestic policy, of which only one - that concerned with the limitation of incomes - was in any way radical. The educational recommendation, which should be quoted in full, did not recommend changes that would seriously threaten existing structures and trends:

> 3. Education. In wartime, educational reform must necessarily be promise rather than performance. At the moment we are not in a position to raise the school-leaving age or increase the teaching staffs of elementary schools. But there are certain steps that we could take towards a democratic educational system. We could start by abolishing the autonomy of the public schools and the older universities, and flooding them with state-aided pupils chosen simply on the grounds of ability. At present, public school education is partly a training in class prejudice and partly a sort of tax that the middle classes pay to the upper class in return for the right to enter the professions. It is true that this state of affairs is altering. The middle classes have begun to rebel against the expensiveness of education, and the war will bankrupt the majority of public schools if it continues for another year or two. The evacuation is also producing certain minor changes. But there is a danger that some of the older schools, which will be able to weather the financial storm the longest, will survive in some form or other as festering centres of snobbery. As for the 10,000 'private schools' that England possesses, the vast majority of them deserve nothing but suppression. They are simply commercial undertakings, and in many cases their educational level is actually lower than that of the elementary schools. They merely exist because of the widespread idea that there is something disgraceful in being educated by the public authorities. The state could quell this idea by declaring itself responsible for all education, even if at the start this were no more than a gesture. We need gestures as well as actions. It is all too obvious that our talk of 'defending democracy' is nonsense while it is a mere accident of birth that decides whether a gifted child shall or shall not get the education it deserves.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 119.

[2] Ibid., p. 121.

Some of these points from Orwell's educational programme have been brought up in previous chapters, but it is nevertheless appropriate at this point to notice once again Orwell's desire to abolish private schools, while preserving public schools, which he envisions as working within a state system. A differential secondary structure would, under these conditions, be preserved, the notion of equality of educational opportunity being defined within the parameters of a qualitatively varied educational structure.

To use a term that has only come into use in recent years, Orwell's view of education as he would have it implemented by English Socialism was essentially meritocratic. The criterion of class was to be replaced by that of 'ability.' In recent years, from research into sociolinguistics and related fields by such people as Basil Bernstein,[1] and from the findings of several post-war educational reports, it has become clear that these two criteria, 'class' and 'ability,' are not as clearly differentiated as they were previously thought to be. It has been found that there is a strong correlation between high achievement within the educational structure and high socio-economic status. Bernstein's findings even suggest that the cultural and linguistic framework of class life makes it almost impossible for a working class child to fully exploit his educational opportunities.

Orwell can be forgiven, however, for not appreciating this fact, which only became apparent after a system similar to the one he was recommending had been in force for some time. At the point when he made these educational proposals her certainly seemed to be unaware of the possibility of a meritocratic system becoming even more rigid than the class structure it was replacing, although, as will be argued later in this chapter, he seems to have grasped this point towards the end of his life.

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[1] Basil Bernstein, Class, Codes and Control (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).

In 1943 Orwell was commissioned to write a second essay which was to deal with much the same kind of questions that had been examined in "The Lion and the Unicorn." This essay, entitled "The English People" was in many ways similar to the earlier piece, but there were subtle differences in his treatment of the questions related to the English class structure and the possibilities for the future. By this time the chance for 'revolution' had definitely passed. Orwell had consequently lost some of his former buouancy of spirit, replacing it with a calmer mood that came from the knowledge that no major social change could be expected.

A great part of this essay is taken up with a warm patriotic exposé of the English national character, and the virtues of the English people, by which term Orwell seemed to mean the working class. At this point he seems to have felt that class differences might prove to be more durable than he had previously imagined:

> We are not justified in assuming that class distinctions are actually disappearing. The essential structure of England is still almost what it was in the nineteenth century. But real differences between man and man are obviously diminishing, and this fact is grasped and even welcomed by people who only a few years ago were clinging desperately to their social prestige.[1]

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[1] Orwell, "The English People," in Collected Essays, III, 39.

By this seemingly contradictory statement Orwell is making the same point that he had made before with regard to the change in appearance undergone by the working class, with the increasing availability of mass-produced clothing and goods. Furthermore, he is now stating that these changes are only superficial, and can co-exist with an enduring class structure.

Certainly, as the war progressed, Orwell became more and more convinced of the inevitable persistence, in some form or another, of the old class structure. Towards the end of the war, in his columns in Tribune and Partisan Review, Orwell recorded with an almost masochistic delight the return of the old class status symbols; evening dress, first and third class on trains,[1] railings around city gardens[2] (the metal railings had earlier been commandeered for armaments), and even top-hats[3] (Orwell was shocked to witness a Temple lawyer surreptitiously polishing his top-hat with obvious delight).

The six-point programme was not re-iterated in the second essay, but Orwell did expand on his discussion of educational reform. In "The English People," Orwell gives the impression that education was the primary means by which he hoped to produce a new and better society. He seems, however, to have been unwilling to examine the vast problems raised by his recommendations.

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[1] Orwell, London Letter to Partisan Review, Fall 1944, in Collected Essays, III, 227.

[2] Orwell, "As I Please," Tribune, 4th Aug. 1944, in Collected Essays, III, 225.

[3] Orwell, "As I Please," Tribune, 6th Oct. 1944, in Collected Essays, III, 289.

There were, however, minor changes in his educational ideas, which need to be commented upon. First of all, there was in the second essay a greater concern with elementary education, which was a topic that he had previously neglected. Orwell makes the recommendation - which incidentally the richer strata of society would never conceivably sanction - that all children should attend the same elementary schools:

> A completely unified system of education is probably not desirable. Some adolescents benefit by higher education, others do not, there is need to differentiate between literary and technical education, and it is better that a few independent experimental schools should remain in existence. But it should be the rule, as it is in some countries already, for all children to attend the same schools up to the age of twelve or at least ten. After that age it becomes necessary to separate the more gifted children from the less gifted, but a uniform educational system for the early years would cut away one of the deepest roots of snobbery.[1]

Once again, it appears that one of Orwell's greatest concerns is with snobbery. Thus, significantly, in this essay he recommends the rather extraordinary measure of teaching all children what he calls a "national accent." This accent was to be truly national, "not merely (like the accents of B.B.C. announcers) a copy of the mannerisms of the upper classes." Indeed, Orwell makes the suggestion that it should be based on something distinctly lower class, "a modification of cockney, perhaps, or of one of the northern accents." Orwell felt that if this could be achieved, the stumbling block which he had found irritating all his life - that of his accent - would be removed for future generations: "It should be impossible, as it is in the United States and some European countries, to determine anyone's status from his accent."[2]

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[1] Orwell, "The English People," in Collected Essays, III, 51.

[2] Ibid.

This indeed was a radical proposal, as was his recommendation that all children should attend the same elementary schools. Orwell nevertheless revealed a typically English educational outlook when he stated that he would like to see a diversified secondary system which allows for improvisation by independent schools. He is typically English in his rejection of the common school principle at the secondary level, and in his feeling that differences in ability manifested by children required different types of school. The same, very English, attitude explains the provisions of the 1944 Education Act which established three types of secondary school: grammar, technical and secondary modern. The outlook of the compilers of this Act, and indeed of the compilers of most of the twentieth century Education Acts, was conditioned largely by the research into intelligence initiated by Cyril Burt. Orwell tacitly seems to have agreed with this view that children are born with a fixed level of intelligence which can be accurately gauged by testing.

Orwell makes further educational recommendations in "The English People," which again relate to elementary education. He realised that an improvement in educational methods was absolutely essential:

> But there is still a need for conscious effort at national re-education. The first step towards this is an improvement in elementary education, which involves not only raising the school leaving age but spending enough money to ensure that elementary schools are adequately staffed and equipped. And there are immense educational possibilities in the radio, the film, and - if it could be freed once and for all from commercial interests - the press.[1]

Orwell's educational proposals may have been vague, but they played an essential part in his vision of a new and better England.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 54.

Education was, for Orwell, the key means by which the constrictions of the class society could be removed, thus allowing Britain to become a dynamic and optimistic nation which would potentially be an example to the rest of the world once the war was over. Orwell no longer expected revolution, but he still actively hoped that the 'classless society' could be achieved.

Animal Farm and the Inevitable Failure of Classlessness

There exists an obvious ambiguity in Orwell's concept of the 'classless society.' He uses the expression both in the sense of 'the society which no longer has traditional classes,' and also in the sense of 'the totally egalitarian society.' Orwell seems to have used the two meanings interchangeably, although it is clearly possible that a society without hereditary classes could nevertheless be hierarchically structured. 'Class' in the normal use of the word refers to social groupings which are largely decided by parentage, and are defined in terms of socio-economic status. A meritocracy, in this sense, is therefore a 'classless society' since status is decided by intellect and achievement. However, such a society can imply an even more rigidly hierarchical social order than the class-structured society.

The educational system plays a far more important role in the meritocratic society than it does in the class society, since it is responsible for status-allocation. Since Orwell placed great emphasis on the educational system as an implement for change, wanting status to be defined in terms of ability, he can be called meritocratic in his outlook.

However, the idea of meritocracy to some extent conflicted with his utopian ideas for a totally egalitarian society, and it was therefore to be expected that he would at some point become aware of this, and attempt to work the problem through. Orwell's two famous books, Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty Four can be seen to be just such an endeavour. Both books are an attempt finally to resolve the dilemma by proving the egalitarian society to be impossible and the meritocratic society both inevitable and distasteful. The remainder of this chapter will be concerned with an interpretation of these works within the context of this particular train of thought.

In 1943, the year when Orwell published "The English People," he also wrote Animal Farm; however he was unable to find a publisher for the book until 1945, for no one was willing to publish a book which was so obviously a parody of the Soviet Revolution at a time when the U.S.S.R. was an ally. Orwell himself had never been a friend of Russia. Indeed, throughout the thirties he had been one of the few leftist writers who was fully awake to the realities of the affiliation of Western European left-wing movements with Moscow. He realised that the socialist and communist movements of the West were to a large extent merely the agents of Moscow foreign policy. Orwell suspected the U.S.S.R. of totalitarianism, and was quite willing to make such allegations even during the war period. It is not surprising, therefore, that the numerous literary critiques of Animal Farm should have concentrated on the anti-Soviet aspect of the work. Nor is it particuarly surprising that, when the book eventually came to be published in 1945, it should have immediately become a best-seller in the West. One suspects that this was largely because it could be interpreted by those smugly confident in the capitalist system as a parody applicable exclusively to the history of the U.S.S.R. This rather over-worked interpretation is not relevant to the present discussion. More significant is that aspect of Animal Farm which is concerned with those questions of social organisation which seem to have preoccupied Orwell at the time.

There is a strong case for suggesting that Animal Farm parodies not only the Russian Revolution, but also social change as it occurs within any society. At the beginning of the "fairy story," as Orwell sub-titles it, the autocrat of Manor Farm, Mr. Jones, is described as having fallen on evil days, in a way remarkably similar to the upper class of English society, who, it will be remembered, were vilified by Orwell as no longer worthy of rule. The main reason for Jones's bad-management, Orwell explains, was his loss of morale, and his propensity to drink:

> In past years Mr. Jones, although a hard master, had been a capable farmer, but of late he had fallen on evil days. He had become much disheartened after losing money in a law-suit, and had taken to drinking more than was good for him.[1]

The revolution by the animals was precipitated by an act of gross negligence on Jones's part. One Saturday night he got so drunk that he did not get back to the farm until Sunday midday. The men, meanwhile, had gone out rabbiting without feeding the animals, and Jones himself immediately fell asleep on the sofa with the News of the World over his face. The animals - who had already had the idea of revolution suggested to them by a wise old pig who had since died - were so angry that they decided to rebel. Orwell had expected much the same kind of rebellion from the English people at the beginning of the war, when they were similarly overwrought by their incompetent rulers. It transpired, however, that they were not sufficiently overwrought to desire revolution.

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[1] Orwell, Animal Farm (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 18.

The revolution in Manor Farm was successful, the men were thrown out, and the animals decided to run the farm themselves in future. The social change that had taken place was symbolised by the change in the farm's name; it was now to be called Animal Farm. However, right from the beginning, a potential oligarchy was evident, since the revolution had been inspired and led by the pigs, who were intellectually superior to the other animals on Jones's farm. Just as in more conventional revolutions the proletariat tends to be led by the intellectuals, so in the case of the animal revolution the leadership came from the pigs.

As in all revolutions, the interests of the leadership and the masses began to diverge once the common enemy had vanished. This divergence became apparent almost immediately on Animal Farm. The pigs were shrewdly able to commandeer the cow's milk and apples for their mash, giving the explanation that they were engaged in brain-work and therefore required the best food. The other animals, in their innocence, did not see in this the elements of exploitation. They were unable to see through the revolutionary rhetoric of the pigs or to realise that they were working towards oligarchy. In some respects the pigs were more skilled than their predecessors, for they were able to use rhetoric for their own ends, and by avoiding crude force in their administration (at least in the early stages) were able to get far more work out of the rest of the animals, who now naively believed they were working for themselves. When things went wrong, the pigs were clever enough to find a scapegoat on whom to blame everything. This scapegoat was Snowball, who at the beginning of the revolution was the rival of another dominant pig called Napoleon. Eventually Napoleon contrived by the use of his terrifying bodyguard of trained dogs to drive Snowball off the farm.

Once he was free of Snowball, Napoleon was able to establish his dictatorship over the farm, and whenever anything was found to go wrong, the blame was laid on the absent Snowball, who was said to skulk around the farm doing mischief at night. Needless to say, the rest of the animals believed these lies, and accepted the dictatorship of Napoleon.

So far Orwell was borrowing his ideas from James Burnham, whose writings he was interested in, and who, in his well-known book The Managerial Revolution, suggested that a proletarian revolution of the Russian kind led inevitably to oligarchy of an elite group. At this point, having established an oligarchy on Animal Farm, Orwell proceeds to utilize the Actonian theory that absolute power corrupts absolutely. In fact, the pigs (now living in the farmhouse) manifest those very vices which had led to the downfall of Jones. The story continues:

> It was a few days later than this that the pigs came upon a case of whisky in the cellar of the farmhouse. It had been overlooked at the time when the house was first occupied. That night there came from the farmhouse the sound of loud singing, in which, to everyone's surprise, the strains of 'Beasts of England' were mixed up. At about half past nine Napoleon, wearing an old bowler hat of Mr. Jones's, was distinctly seen to emerge from the back door, gallop rapidly round the yard, and disappear indoors again. But in the morning a deep silence hung over the farmhouse. Not a pig appeared to be stirring. It was nearly nine o'clock when

> Squealer made his appearance, walking slowly and dejectedly, his eyes dull, his tail hanging limply behind him, and with every appearance of being seriously ill. He called the animals together and told them he had a terrible piece of news to impart. Comrade Napoleon was dying!
>
> A cry of lamentation went up. Straw was laid down outside the doors of the farmhouse, and the animals walked on tiptoe. With tears in their eyes, they asked one another what they would do if their Leader was taken from them. A rumour went round that Snowball had after all contrived to induce the poison into Napoleon's food. At eleven o'clock Squealer came out to make another announcement. As his last act upon earth, Comrade Napoleon had pronounced a solemn decree: the drinking of alcohol was to be punished by death.[1]

Fortunately for Napoleon, he nevertheless survived, and lived to drink again. Yet this degeneracy and corruption necessarily affected the efficiency of the farm, and it was not long before the rest of the animals were working far harder than they had in Jones's day, and for less returns. Gradually they were reduced to total serfdom; their passive subordination to the pigs was a source of envy for the neighbouring farms. The seven commandments which had been draw up for the guidance of all the animals at the time of the revolution was whitewashed off the barn wall and replaced with the caption that has since become a household proverb: "all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others."

The circle of events was completed by the final transition of the pigs into men. They learned to walk on two legs, carry whips, and began to socialise with the neighbouring farmers. The rest of the animals were amazed at the transformation which took place at a dinner party at the farmhouse. Mr. Pilkington, a neighbour, had congratulated the pigs on their achievement, and Napoleon stood to answer the toast:

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[1] Orwell, Animal Farm, p. 92.

> "Gentlemen," concluded Napoleon, "I will give you the same toast as before, but in a different form. Fill your glasses to the brim. Gentlemen, here is my toast: To the prosperity of Manor Farm!"
>
> There was the same hearty cheering as before, and the mugs were emptied to the dregs. But as the animals outside gazed at the scene, it seemed to them that something strange was happening. What was it that had altered in the faces of the pigs? Clover's old dim eyes flitted from one face to another. Some had five chins, some had four, some had three. But what was it that seemed to be melting and changing? Then, the applause having come to an end, the company took up their cards and continued the game that had been interrupted, and the animals crept silently away.
>
> But they had not gone twenty yards when they stopped short. An uproar of voices was coming from the farmhouse. They rushed back and looked through the window again. Yes, a violent quarrel was in progress. There were shoutings, bangings on the table, sharp suspicious glances, furious denials. The source of the trouble appeared to be that Napoleon and Mr. Pilkington had each played an ace of spades simultaneously.
>
> Twelve voices were shouting in anger, and they were all alike. No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which.[1]

The events have come a full circle, and, one supposes, it will not be long before the pigs also lose control of the farm on account of their dissipation and obsession with outside relationships.

The events described in Animal Farm are cyclical, for they constitute just one 'revolution' of what must be a cycle that must forever repeat itself. Revolutionary democracy would be replaced by autocracy, autocracy by degeneracy, and degeneracy by revolution. In his analysis of the middle class, Orwell had noticed that this strata constantly infiltrates and replaced the upper class by adopting upper class mannerisms and values, a process similar to that which had taken place in Animal Farm. Revolution had been possible on the farm because the animals had been enlisted by means of skilful propaganda; but once it had taken place it became evident that the proletariat of the animals had been betrayed, and the revolution had been merely (to use Burnham's term) a managerial revolution. Almost by definition the proletariat lacked the talent to assert its rights, or even to bring their 'common decency' to bear on the new order. Reiterating Burnham's thesis, Orwell portrays the proletariat as simply the serf population who labour to keep the ruling class in comfort, and who, on occasion, can be recruited by some rising star to help carry through what turns out to be a palace revolution.

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[1] Ibid., p. 119.

Nineteen Eighty Four and the Evils of Meritocracy

So far in this chapter it has been argued that Orwell's ideas on the practical possibility of achieving the classless society were undergoing constant re-appraisal during the last years of his life. It has been suggested that Orwell's earlier utopian ideas about an egalitarian society were checked by his own conviction that men were naturally unequal. He could not avoid the conclusion that since men were naturally unequal, it was inevitable that the lower class would be exploited. The question now raised is whether he eventually perceived that the meritocratic society which he sought to establish was potentially just as immoral as the society it replaced. Certainly, from Animal Farm one is led to believe that Orwell fully concurred with Burnham in expecting the proletariat to be exploited no matter what form of social organisation predominated.

There is a further development of this train of thought in Orwell's last work Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949). This novel seems to suggest that the model projected in Animal Farm was not in fact of universal application, since under certain circumstances the endless cycle could be broken. The society described in Nineteen Eighty-Four confirms the hypothesis that this cycle could in fact, under certain circumstances, be fixed permanently at the point of total hegemony by an all-powerful oligarchy. The novel supposes a world where the three main super-powers have discovered the formula for keeping society static; in many ways the formula resembles that used by the pigs to gain and keep control, with a few modifications. Orwell postulates that the oligarchy came to power by way of English Socialism, renamed in Newspeak 'Ingsoc', which ironically seems to parody the very social remedy that Orwell had himself offered England in the early forties. Borrowing once again from Burnham, Orwell hypothesises the identity of opposites, socialism and fascism, showing both ideologies as tending towards centralisation and ultimately totalitarianism.

If one supposès that every oligarchy or ruling class has essentially two threats to its continuing existence, the threat of degeneration from within and the threat of revolution or war from without, then it can be seen that the Oceania society (and incidentally Eurasia and Eastasia societies also) had managed to so arrange things that neither of these two threats existed. The threat from within was eliminated by allowing the necessary amount of 'permeability' (to use a modern sociological term) of the ruling class. The society, therefore, was in some degree a meritocracy, since theoretically at least, an individual reached the limit of his potential. The process is described in the forbidden book written by the heretic Goldstein (the Nineteen Eighty-Four equivalent of Snowball) which Winston, the hero of the story, is given to read:

> Between the two branches of the Party there is a certain amount of interchange, but only so much as will ensure that weaklings are excluded from the Inner Party and that ambitious members of the Outer Party are made harmless by allowing them to rise. Proletarians, in practice, are not allowed to graduate into the Party. The most gifted among them, who might possibly become nuclei of discontent, are simply marked down by the Thought Police and eliminated. But this state of affairs is not necessarily permanent, nor is it a matter of principle. The party is not a class in the old sense of the word. It does not aim at transmitting power to its own children, as such; and if there were no other way of keeping the ablest people at the top, it would be perfectly prepared to recruit an entire new generation from the ranks of the proletariat.[1]

The threat from without, meanwhile, was countered by the continuous state of war which gave the masses of the Outer Party something on which to vent their anger. Borrowing his ideas once again from Burnham, Orwell describes a situation where war continued unceasingly between the three major powers. But the results of war were never allowed to be decisive, the ultimate military weapons never employed. Goldstein describes the warfare as follows:

> The war, therefore, if we judge it by the standards of previous wars, is merely an imposture. It is like the battle between certain ruminant animals whose horns are set at such an angle that they are incapable of hurting one another. But though it is unreal, it is not meaningless. It eats up the surplus of consumable goods, and it helps to preserve the special mental atmosphere that a hierarchical society needs. War, it will be seen, is now a purely internal affair. In the past, the ruling groups of all countries, although they might recognise

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[1] Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 167.

> their common interest and therefore limit the destructiveness of war, did fight against one another, and the victor always plundered the vanquished. In our own day they are not fighting against one another at all. The war is waged by each ruling group against its own subjects, and the object of the war is not to make or prevent conquests of territory, but to keep the structure of society intact.[1]

Goldstein himself was also used as part of the technique to eliminate the threat from without. It could be that Goldstein in fact did not exist at all, nevertheless his image was used to symbolise treachery and to explain any malfunctioning of the system.

In other minor ways the tyranny of the Inner Party had been sophisticated over time. Just as the pigs had acquired the milk and apples, so also the Inner Party, living in comparative luxury, made quite certain that the disparity between their style of life and that of the Outer Party and proles corresponded to their prestige. Orwell seems to be re-iterating a point made on several occasions throughout his writings, that status symbols are an essential part of social domination. The return of the top-hats at the end of the war meant the return of the class system.

Another newly-discovered agent for control was Newspeak, the official language of Oceania. The virtue of this language (which demonstrates Orwell's interest in the philosophy of language) was that it had a constantly decreasing vocabulary which meant, theoretically, that eventually it would be possible to eliminate from the language everything that conflicted with the official ideology. Once this was achieved all 'crimethink' would be impossible.

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[1] _Ibid._, p. 160.

The life of the proles in Oceania deserves some mention. They were living at a standard very similar to that endured during the Depression, being obliged to live in decaying Victorian terraces and tenements. Winston was acutely disappointed to find, on visiting a pub while on a dangerous expedition into a prole area, that those very individuals who alone held the key to the true past were unable to make use of it. He found an old man, almost eighty years old - far older than any member of the Outer or Inner Party since most people of those stratas were eliminated before reaching such an age - whom he attempted to question about the past. Yet the old man always replied at cross-purposes to Winston's questions, and Winston regretfully concluded that the old man's mind was "a mere rubbish heap of details." There was nothing to be expected from the proles, and Winston was deeply disappointed:

> Winston sat for a moment or two contemplating his empty glass, and hardly noticed when his feet carried him out into the street again. Within twenty years at the most, he reflected, the huge and simple question 'Was life better before the Revolution than it was now?' would have ceased once and for all to be answerable. But in effect it was unanswerable even now, since the few scattered survivors from the ancient world were incapable of comparing one age with another. They remembered a million useless things, a quarrel with a workmate, the expression on a long-dead sister's face, the swirls of dust on a windy morning seventy years ago: but all the relevant facts were outside the range of their vision. They were like the ant, which can see small objects but not large ones.[1]

Winston still had faith in the proles, but it was a faith that totally defied all the evidence. It was obvious that the proles were no threat to the state. They continued to lead a thoughtless, debased existence, losing whatever leaders they had to the Thought Police. They would continue to be taken in by the open fraud of the Lottery, they would continue to read the novelettes and sing the songs that had been created by some vast machine in the Ministry of Truth. There was not much hope for change in Oceania.

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[1] Ibid., p. 78.

Orwell's novel Nineteen Eighty-Four therefore postulates the creation of a totally static society, fixed at the point of ultimate tyranny. To quote the interrogator O'Brian, "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face - for ever."[1] This extremely pessimistic outlook was Orwell's final statement, for he died shortly after completing the book.

An Obstinate Faith

It has been suggested in this chapter that Orwell's attitude to society and particularly his expectations for the future, changed radically in the last years of his life. The central issue around which this change revolved was the practicality and desirability of meritocracy, the social format which requires the educational process to institutionalise social selection for the creation of a hierarchical society based on 'ability.' From his educational proposals written in the early war years it appears that Orwell keenly hoped for the re-structuring of the English educational system along meritocratic lines. And yet, from the novels Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four, it is patently clear that he grew to be deeply aware of the dangers of meritocracy. Admittedly, international concerns distracted Orwell from re-evaluating his educational proposals, but it seems reasonable to suggest that he would have been anxious to forestall the creation of a full-blown meritocratic England. It is difficult to imagine what he might have suggested, for there seems to be no third alternative, that is, one which avoids both the snobbishness of class-structured education and the elitism of a meritocratic system.

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[1] Ibid., p. 215.

In the end, one suspects, Orwell would have given up on the question For ultimately, and perhaps irrationally, he still hoped for the egalitarian society, although he had no clear idea about how this kind of world could be brought about. It might be argued that this vague hope did not remain with Orwell to the end, since Nineteen Eighty-Four is far from being an optimistic novel. Much of its pessimism, however, can be explained as the result of Orwell's sense of hopelessness at his advancing T.B. Despite his valiant attempt at making a new future by marrying again, in hospital, three months before his death, he spent most of his last few months in sanatoriums, where he must have been aware of his physical degeneration.

Yet even in Nineteen Eighty-Four there are glimmers of optimism. Winston appreciated that all the facts were against the possibility of a prole uprising, and yet he still retained a stubborn faith. In an article written in 1946 analysing James Burnham's ideas, Orwell himself asserted that irrational faith could itself be the explanation of its own fulfilment. He quotes the example of the faith in victory held by the common people in 1940 in total contravention of all existing evidence:

> Suppose in 1940 you had taken a Gallup Poll in England, on the question 'Will Germany win the war?' You would have found, curiously enough, that the group answering 'Yes' contained a far higher percentage of intelligent people - people with an I.Q. of over 120, shall we say - than the group answering 'No.' The same would have been true in the middle of 1942. In this case the figures would not have been so striking, but if you had made the question 'Will Germany capture Alexandria?' or 'Will the Japanese hold on to the territories they have captured?', then once again there would have been a very marked tendency for intelligence to concentrate in the 'Yes' group. In every case the less gifted person would have been likelier to give the right answer.[1]

Orwell is once again showing his disdain for intellectuals in this passage. Later he ascribes all the defeatism of the British nation during the war to them. Yet he is also showing that victory can result from a faith by the majority in victory, despite the odds. Orwell proceeds in the article to criticise Burnham, from whom he had borrowed so much, for his failure to acknowledge that an existing trend could be reversed. He quotes examples from Burnham's writings where his prognoses at different times have totally contradicted each other, simply because they were based on the state of affairs of the moment. In contrast to Burnham, Orwell wishes to assert a belief in the unlikely and the irrational. He acknowledges, as he has to, that Burnham's theories about the inevitability of oligarchy and world totalitarianism are very convincing, and yet he makes the important reservation that man is fundamentally moral:

> Obviously, human beings have impulses which are not selfish. Man, therefore, is an animal that can act morally when he acts as an individual, but becomes unmoral when he acts collectively.[2]

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[1] Orwell, "James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution" (1946), in Collected Essays, IV, 206.

[2] Ibid., p. 210.

The portents for the future are bad, Orwell agrees, but at the same time opportunities for egalitarianism exist now as they have never existed before, "The justification for class distinctions, if there is a justification, is no longer the same, because there is no mechanical reason why the average human being should continue to be a drudge."[1]

In the face of his approaching death Orwell had shocked his friends by marrying again; in Nineteen Eight-Four, through the medium of Winston, he asserted a faith in the proles in defiance of logic; and when confronted by Burnham's convincing pronouncements Orwell continued to affirm his faith in the essential decency of man, which in the end would make utopia possible.

There was no final resolution to Orwell's fears for the future. He had started in the thirties with a humanistic concern to establish a better society along vaguely socialist lines. By the time war had broken out he had become aware of the growing new middle class, which he felt was destined to destroy the old classes of the past. Although he had reservations about a future controlled by such a class, and doubts about its cultural quality, he nevertheless was prepared to sponsor it to the extent of making recommendations for social reform which he felt would inevitably strengthen it. Most particularly, he wished to recommend the creation of a totally meritocratic educational system, on the understanding that such a system would finally dispose of old class privileges and divisions. There was no logical reason, however, for his assumption that a destruction of the old classes would mean that the future would be classless. Yet Orwell only became fully aware that a meritocratic educational system could under certain circumstances lead to an even more hierarchical social structure some years later. The discovery that this could actually happen struck Orwell with considerable force and was expressed in its full horror in his last novel Nineteen Eighty-Four. Yet the apparent hopelessness of this last work does not necessarily imply that Orwell had abandoned his obstinate faith in a better world for the future. Glimpses of this faith can even be found in Nineteen Eighty-Four.

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[1] Ibid., p. 211.

Orwell had unconsciously betrayed his own hopes for a classless society by advocating a meritocratic educational structure in the early war years. He had done this because he felt that education was, in the last resort, the only means by which a better society could be achieved. At the end of his life he was still clinging to this faith in a better society. Unfortunately he did not have a clear enough notion of the structure of such a society in order to be able to devise an educational system that might bring such a society into being.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

There are two main strands in the discussion of Orwell's interpretation of class and education in England which need to be drawn together in a conclusion. One of these strands concerns Orwell's general orientation to the problems he discusses; the other is concerned with the actual relationship between class and education as it appears from Orwell's writings. It is impossible to make a final judgement on this last question, however, without first having understood Orwell's general orientation.

In the search for an assessment of Orwell's general outlook, Raymond Williams provides a useful point of departure. Suggesting that Orwell belongs to a recognisable romantic tradition, he explains Orwell's behaviour as a result of "the paradox of exile."[1] The concept of exile is an interesting one to apply in this case since it implies exclusion from a group to which an individual has to some degree belonged in the past. Being excluded from the group, the individual is both attracted and repelled by the group at the same time.

This would seem to fit Orwell's case very neatly. From his writings it appears that he suffered from a sense of social anomie which was the result of being unable to identify with any social class. This was not the result of having lived his life outside the social system; on the contrary, it was the result of a series of failed attempts to gain admittance into, or feel at ease in, any one of a range of social groups. In this sense Orwell was indeed an outsider. As a result he retained ambiguous feelings towards the various social groups into which, at various points in his life, he attempted to gain admittance.

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[1] Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, p. 279.

If Orwell's autobiographical account of his schooldays is to be taken as a valid account, it would appear that his attempt to integrate into the upper class was doomed from the start. Lacking the economic and social credentials, Orwell's position among the upper classes in the schools he attended was extremely uncomfortable. From what his contemporaries recall of his days at Eton, Orwell seems to have retreated behind a mask of eccentricity and quietly cynical rebellion. For the rest of his life he spoke with an upper class accent, which put him rather at odds with the middle classes, but which nevertheless was not sufficient to secure his acceptance into the upper class. One finds, therefore, that Orwell presents a pseudo-revolutionary stand with regard to this class, condemning it for its snobbishness, but not for its elitism; admitting that its rule had become careless and inefficient, but unwilling to advocate violent revolution.

Orwell's family was itself unambiguously middle class, but this did not make Orwell's identification with this class any easier. Specifically, the Blairs belonged to the Anglo-Indian group, although they had retired from the Indian Civil Service. Orwell seems to have been particularly eager to identify with this class, since he took the trouble to pass the difficult exams for the Imperial Police, rather than go to university. On being accepted, he chose to go to Burma, a less popular province, significantly because he had family connections there. Much to his parents' dismay, he chose to resign his commission after five years, disapproving of the bigotry of British rule at a time of considerable native unrest. This failure to adapt to the conventions of the Anglo-Indian group resulted in a certain cynicism towards the group as a whole, an expression of which can be found in Burmese Days and in the descriptions of Bowling's wife's family in Coming Up For Air.

Another middle class group with which Orwell had rather strained relations were the intellectuals. His bitterness towards this group seems at first to be rather strange, since he himself was undoubtedly an intellectual. The antagonism in this case was the result of differences of ideological commitment. Orwell's past had made him an individualist, somewhat out of touch from mainstream English life, who was unable to accept the kind of socialism espoused by the majority of left-wing intellectuals. Even during the Spanish Civil War Orwell found himself at odds with the party-liners. Nevertheless he had tried to join left-wing organisations; for example he was for a time a participating member of the Independent Labour Party. If, therefore, he felt alienated from the majority of intellectuals, it was not for want of trying.

Two years spent teaching in cheap private schools was sufficient to demonstrate to Orwell that he had little in common with the lower middle class. His portrayal of lower middle class life, consequently, is harsh almost to the point of exaggeration. Orwell found that he disliked the petty-minded, aspidistra type of respectability almost as much as he disliked the snobbery of the upper class.

Orwell seems to have had a warm attraction to the working class, their life-style and their culture. For the first time he was confronted by a class which was totally unpretentious, and he found the encounter refreshing. In a half-hearted way, in 1936, he attempted to live among the working class as one of them, but it seems that by this stage in his life he did not hold out much hope of breaking 'the invisible glass wall' and integrating fully with the working class. As his acquaintances of the Wigan Pier episode testify, he did not make any great effort to endear himself to the northern workers. Inevitably, once again, he found himself 'exiled.' Whether with justification or without, Orwell seems subsequently to have developed a derogatory attitude towards working class potential, and does not seem to have seriously considered the possibility of 'dictatorship of the proletariat.'

For several years of his life, Orwell experimented with down-and-out life, and his experiences resulted in interesting and often sympathetic descriptions of tramps and outcastes. This was the only social group which was prepared to accept him with no questions asked. Yet Orwell could never in his heart fully accept such a debased existence - tramp life was for him the apprenticeship for a career as a writer. He informed his friends that he "did not answer to the name of down-and-out," and on occasion referred to the intellectual vacuity of the tramps in a disparaging fashion. On establishing himself as a writer, he left the outcaste class for good.

There was one class not only with whom Orwell had absolutely nothing in common, but to which he never made overtures. This was the 'new middle class' of the future, and Orwell felt antipathy towards it largely because he himself belonged so much to the past. His family had well-established roots in a declining Empire, his own education had been a very traditional one, and as a writer he constantly expressed nostalgia for the past, particularly the Edwardian period. He did not like the idea of a future dominated by the godless new men of the suburbs.

Having assessed the reasons for Orwell's social exile, it is possible to proceed to a summary of the relationship between social class and education as it appeared to this outsider.

In the case of the upper class, Orwell believed that the family was a far less intimate structure than was the case with other classes, and parents were far more willing (and able) to delegate child-rearing, first to a servant, and then to the preparatory and public schools. Orwell's description of these schools shows that they re-inforced upper class values both through the structure of the schools, and through the values which they deliberately enforced. Since upper-class boys boarded at their schools, they tended to develop strong in-group loyalties which substituted for absent family bonds. Occasionally this led to homosexuality, in any case the loyalties always proved useful in later life. An attitude which, according to Orwell, was deliberately cultivated was that of snobbishness, both with regard to rank and wealth. It appears that this condition was worse in preparatory schools of lesser status, where relative wealth played an exaggerated role in social relationships. The curriculum of upper class schools, meanwhile, emphasised classical studies, which served the function of providing the upper class with a distinguishing characteristic marking it off from the rest of society, even though classical training could provide no useful training for rule. Orwell, being an outsider, criticised upper class school curriculum for its outdatedness, and attacked the snobbishness and the enforced stoicism of the schools. But since he was at the same time attracted to the upper class, he refrained from making an attack of principle, even though, as a socialist, he might have been expected to attack these schools on account of their elitism.

Similarly, when it came to an analysis of the products of upper class education - the ruling class itself - Orwell once again limited his criticisms to superficials. He claimed that the ruling class was out of touch with the present and was therefore governing inefficiently. Nevertheless he constantly maintained that the upper class was, and always had been, "morally sound."

Orwell's analysis of the middle classes is concerned almost exclusively with the declining sections of those classes. He presents an illuminating description of the impoverished upper middle class who made outrageous sacrifices in order to appear "respectable," and who paid extravagant fees so that their children would be able to keep up the good name of the family. Orwell also described the unbelievably dingy world of the lower middle class, who, in their narrow-minded ignorance, imposed their values on the cheap private schools, which existed only for profit, and with absolutely no concern for the education of the children.

Life for the provincial lower middle class child was, from Orwell's evidence, far less oppressive. Not only were these children allowed greater freedom by their parents and by the open environment in which they lived, but they were also less oppressed in the schools they attended, which were often long-established grammar schools.

Orwell obviously saw "respectability" as a typically middle class disease, encouraged by the schools, and having the greatest debilitating effect on the impoverished upper middle class. Yet it took on a positively alarming appearance when it was combined with the narrow-mindedness of the non-conformist shopkeeper class of the suburbs. Some sections of the provincial lower middle class were, however, able to avoid contagion by way of their healthy, almost working class, attitude to life.

Orwell had great admiration for the home culture of the working class, as appears from countless passages in his writings. He described in detail and warmly appreciated working class family life, which he felt was deeply moral, and relatively unaffected by materialism. He found similarly admirable qualities among the down-and-outs who were often fine individuals despite their difficult life. Furthermore, he understood the working class scorn of schooling, for he realized that it was forced on them by the middle classes. It was clear to him that the schools had little to offer the working class.

At the same time, Orwell was uncertain about the ability of the working class to assert its rights. He observed himself how a rising star from the working class was inevitably co-opted by the middle classes and their value-system, thus leaving the working class leaderless.

In the early war period Orwell made a number of recommendations for educational reform, which in their proposed opening up of the educational system to 'ability,' largely anticipated the 1944 Education Act. At first Orwell was clearly unaware that such reforms would inevitably benefit the class he most of all disliked - the new middle class.

When they were first made, these suggestions for educational reform were in fact a logical result of Orwell's utopian faith in a classless society. In his last years, as appears from his novels Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four, Orwell seems to have begun to doubt the possibility of achieving a classless society. Some individuals would always be 'more equal than others'; the unscrupulous would always exploit the innocent. It was even possible that a tyrannical regime might enforce its hegemony indefinitely by means of, among other things, a meritocratic educational structure. The faintest glimmer of hope - the possibility of a proletarian revolution - could still be perceived by the desperate, but it was a 'life-lie,' a hopeless faith that defied rationality.

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